Interview with Ronald D. Flack

Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

RONALD D. FLACK

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is January 7, 1998 and this is an interview with Ronald D. Flack being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. To begin would you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family.

FLACK: I was born in a small town in northern Minnesota called Cloquet in 1934. My father was the manager of the J.C. Penney store. I went to high school in Cloquet and to the University of Minnesota, first at Duluth and then Minneapolis.

Q: I would like to go back earlier to your life in this small town.

FLACK: At that point it was a small town of about 7,000. Looking back on it, it was a kind of fairy tale type of thing, a real, good old fashioned Minnesota small town. There was no crime, everybody knew everybody else. It was a very calm, sane, collected existence that was, as I look back on it, almost idealistic. It was a lovely place to be raised and go to school. I went through the local school system. At that time I was really not interested in the Foreign Service. I didn't even know what it was.

Q: Did you go through high school there?

FLACK: Yes, I graduated in 1952.

Q: Then you would have been as a small child exposed to World WaII. How did this affect you?

FLACK: I have one brother, ten years older than I, who was in World War II. He went off to the war in 1942 when I was eight. So, between the time I was eight and twelve, the war was going on and my brother was very much involved in it. He was a radar operator on a B24 in the Pacific theater and had 42 combat missions. The family was kind of living on the edge of its chairs, so to speak, because people were being killed right and left. Even in our little town, my brother's best friend was killed. That family lost two sons. We got correspondence regularly and, of course, to me he was my hero, my brother, ten years older, in the war and flying in an airplane bombing the Japanese. It was kind of exciting. He stayed on in the Air Force, retired as a major and then had a second career with the aerospace industry.

Q: Did you pick up the map habit? So many people of your generatiobecause of the war really looked at maps.

FLACK: You know, that is interesting, I never thought of that, but it is absolutely true that I did look at maps to know where he was, even when he was in the States for a while. Once he was in Boca Raton, Florida and in Idaho and I got to know these training places on the map. Then he went off and was in the Philippines, Guam, and various other places. So, yes indeed, we did look at maps to see where he was, but frankly I had never thought about that before.

Speaking of maps, one of the interesting things he did was to send back to us from time to time these silk air force maps that aviators had with them so that if they went down into the water they would not disintegrate. They were beautiful, printed silk military maps. They

have disappeared and I can't tell you how many times I wished I had kept some of those maps.

Q: In high school, what were your reading habits?

FLACK: That was in the fifties and basically my reading habits were dictated by the agenda of the school. I had an excellent English teacher so the American classics typical for an eleventh and twelfth grader would be assigned. I can't say that I was an avid reader back in those days. I didn't really start reading a lot in terms of real literature until after I graduated from college.

Q: I think this often happens. The spark is there but it doesn'germinate.

FLACK: I remember when I graduated from college thinking, “Aha, now I can read what I want to read and not what I have to read.” Then I started reading Dostoevsky and things like that, which I had always wanted to read but had never been required to read and didn't have the time to do it because of other studies.

Q: After high school you went where?

FLACK: I went to the University of Minnesota in Duluth, which is about 20 miles from Cloquet, for two years and then transferred down to the main campus in Minneapolis for my second two years.

Q: When you started college you were there from when to when?

FLACK: I was in Duluth from the fall of 1952 to the fall of 1954.Then I went down to Minneapolis and finished up in 1956.

Q: When you went to university, what did you want to do?

FLACK: Because of my father's business background, I was basically looking toward a business career and majored in economics and business. The first two years in Duluth I took the basic requirements, I don't think I had a major at that point. It was just doing all the basic work that you do in the first two years at university. So, it was really the last two years that I did my work in business and economics, which in retrospect was a terrible mistake because I didn't like it at all and didn't do well in it. My college marks were mediocre at best.

Q: From the depths of Minnesota where did the interest in governmendevelop?

FLACK: My father was a Republican, a conservative. National politics was not something that was of major concern or talked about in Cloquet. In my youth, I remember Roosevelt was president and nobody in Cloquet liked Franklin Roosevelt. But it was not the kind of political hatred that you see nowadays towards Clinton.

Q: Well, there was but usually in the upper reaches of thplutocracy.

FLACK: Minnesota, as you probably know, is a pretty liberal state and even back then we always had Democratic governors and the congressman from our area who had been around forever was a Democrat and couldn't be unseated. We still have Democrats from that particular area of Minnesota. So, national politics was not something of great concern and people didn't talk about it a lot. My first run in with politics at a local level was when I was a senior in high school. My father, as I mentioned, had a J. C. Penney store and there was a strike at the store. The local union was trying to unionize the store and there was an election which came up 50/50. The company instructed my father to vote against unionization, which he did, and the union went on strike. It lasted for about nine months. It was a personally traumatizing event for my family and myself because I was working for my father at that time after school. I would go in and sweep the floors and do the stuff that needed to be done in the store including selling. Everyday going in I would have to cross the picket line and be taunted and yelled at. There were several incidents of vandals

coming into the store unnoticed and damaging merchandise. We got threats at home. This was a union town, dominated by three factories. So, for the better part of the population we became the real villains, except for the management part of the town who thought we were heros. So, even though I basically have been all my life a liberal, I had a very traumatic experience with unions at that time.

Q: Did that affect your social life?

FLACK: Yes, very much. As a kid in high school I would receive anonymous notes in class calling my father names. It was very, very uncomfortable.

Q: One always thinks of the University of Minnesota being a liberal institution, not of the caliber of liberalism that Wisconsin is, which seems to go sort of socialist radicalist. Did you find that there was this liberalism at the University of Minnesota?

FLACK: Yes, there was. My first year at the campus in Duluth was in 1952 when Eisenhower was elected and I remember that election, Eisenhower vs. Stevenson. At that point I was kind of reflecting my father's point of view of conservatism. So, I was for Eisenhower. I didn't vote in that election because I was not old enough. I remember my English professor, when the results were known and Eisenhower was elected, came into class and sat us all down and looked at us and said, “People, aren't you afraid?” We looked at him and said, “What do you mean?” He said, “Aren't you afraid because of the person we now have as President of the United States? Don't you have this fear of what is going to happen to the country and to us?” He was genuinely afraid for his country. I remember this as a very telling incident in terms of the views of the faculty. And, I think most of the faculty at that point were of a liberal view point.

Q: How long did you keep up the business side of things?

FLACK: Until I graduated and then I went to work for the J.C. Penney company for six months or so and was assigned to a store in Wisconsin as the manager of a section of the

store. I didn't stay there long because there was the draft in those days which was hanging over the heads of all of us. I knew that I was going to have to go and my number came up and I was drafted into the Army. That brought to a close that short career. I must say, in terms of the formation of my future years, it was my army experience that really changed it.

Q: I think this shook most of us out. The generation of the Foreign Service which is now retiring and prior to that, the post-war generation before the end of the Cold War, is a product of essentially having military experience.

FLACK: Yes. And mine was, I must say, extraordinary. I should saa few words about that.

Q: Please do.

FLACK: I was drafted in the spring of 1957. I went off to basic training. You know at basic training they give you a battery of tests and lo and behold, after I took those tests I was called up one day to a special room where an officer said, “We are from the counterintelligence corps, the CIC, and are interested in you because of how you did on the tests. We are looking for people who would serve as special agents for the counterintelligence corps. But, in order to do this, you have to spend more than your normal time in the service. In other words, instead of spending two years you would spend three. It is up to you. Do what you want.” I thought about this for about a week and decided rather than spending two years behind a typewriter somewhere doing something stupid, this was a chance to get some interesting training and do something different for three years. My experience with the J.P. Penney company was such that I was not terribly anxious to go back to it. So, I signed up for this.They sent me to special training school, Fort Holabird, in Baltimore. The counterintelligence corps had a special training school there for special agents. I learned the techniques of counter espionage such as surveillance techniques and interviewing techniques. I think I was there for three months. Then I was sent to French language training at the Presidio of Monterrey in California

for six months. I was a private first class at this point. We were a small class of about six people. There were four officers and two enlisted men. I was the only one from CIC.

Q: Of course, at that time our troops were in France.

FLACK: That is right. The point was, when I was at Fort Holabird, they asked what language I wanted to study. Basically the choice was Korean, German or French, as I recall. I put down German but got French. The six months at the Presidio was a wonderful experience.

Q: What platoon were you at the Presidio?

FLACK: I couldn't tell you now.

Q: I was in the sixth platoon in 1951-52 studying Russian at thPresidio.

FLACK: It was a great place. They had built new barracks, probably after you left, which were quite comfortable. It was kind of like a college dormitory. There were two to a room, excellent study facilities. It was really first class all the way through. Of course, that is a wonderful part of California and I had a great time.

Then I was assigned to France, to the 766th CIC Detachment at Orleans and Poitiers. Off I went to France. I arrived at Orleans, had an interview with the commanding officer, who after the interview said, “We are going to send you as a resident agent to a one man post at Saumur in the Loire valley, which is about 50-60 miles from Orleans.” I was surprised at this as I was expecting to do intelligence work in a larger office. But, no, they sent me off as the resident agent in Saumur. There was an American base there for which I was responsible for counterintelligence activities. It was a U.S. Army signal depot. Also, I was to liaise with French civilian and military intelligence officials in 22 departments in the western part of France. They gave me a car, an apartment, a 38 detective special and said I was on my own.

Q: You wore civilian clothes?

FLACK: Yes, civilian clothes. I never wore a uniform.

So, I was assigned then in Saumur for that period of time and had aabsolutely incredible time. Someday I may write a book about it.

Q: While I am doing these oral histories I like to capture a little social, or whatever you call it, history. I wonder if you could tell me some of the types of things you were dealing with there.

FLACK: I will give you a couple of examples. The line of communications which went through France up into Germany, started in La Rochelle. Along that line there were U.S. military installations, and this one was a signal depot at Saumur. These installations' security, all through Germany and France, was handed by, believe it or not, Polish army refugees. They were called the Polish Guards. Each of these bases had a detachment of Polish military men headed by a Polish officer who reported to the security officer of the base. They were the guards. They were the people that stood duty at the doors, the front gates and walked the perimeters, etc. Well, in terms of counterintelligence for the U.S. military, you can imagine the nightmare this caused. These were all people with families back in Poland who were susceptible to all sorts of pressures by the Polish and Soviet intelligence authorities to give information about US bases. What a wonderful source of information. The U.S. Army general who decided to do this after World War II must have been out of his mind. They didn't know what to do with all these Polish military refugees and decided to form these paramilitary Polish Guard units and let them guard our bases. What a stupid thing to do from an intelligence point of view.

A lot of my work had to do with these guards. Their personal contacts, and a lot of them had contacts with the Polish embassy in Paris, with their relatives back home through mail, with strange Polish persons who would turn up in town. Part of my work was to try to

find out what was going on. While I was there, we had at least one case of a fellow who was clearly in contact with officials of the Polish embassy and although at my level down there I never proved anything, he eventually was removed. I frankly don't know what ever happened to him.

Another of my responsibilities was managing a network of informants and this turned out to be probably one of the most important things that I did in terms of counterintelligence while I was in France. There are two kinds of informants. One was the legal type of informant, which were the normal contacts that we could have at the base to whom I either gave money or gifts to give me information. Then we had contacts which, according to the status of forces agreement, were illegal. For example, I had one in the prefecture in Angers, the R2. These were people that I cultivated and gave gifts to in exchange for information, but this was strictly illegal from the French point of view, but standard procedure for us in the CIC.

One of my informants, who was a legal informant, worked on the base and I became very friendly with him. He lived in a chateau outside of town. He would invite me to dinner with his family. Well, his family, was not really his family. This fellow was a French Jew who had lost his family in World War II and had been taken in by this family to live with them. The chateau was owned by the French Ministry of Justice and used as a weekend retreat for ministry officials who would come down from Paris. The woman who ran it, kind of like a hotel, was the widow of a French army officer and she had a son who became a friend and who I am still in close contact with. Anyway, I would spend Sundays with these people and got to know them very well. So, I had a very interesting and intimate relationship with a French family that gave me a lot of insights on French culture, language, etc. What became very interesting was that I realized after knowing this woman, who was in her forties, that her brother was General de Gaulle's right hand man. A five star general in the French army who was the aide de camp of Charles de Gaulle, who was president at that time. I might add that I arrived in France in May, 1958, the same month de Gaulle took

power, so I was contemporary with his activities. I suddenly realized that I had a contact who had an extraordinary contact with President de Gaulle.

I was reporting all this and suddenly officials very high up became very interested in me and the information I could potentially gather as to what was going on through this relationship. So, I cultivated the relationship, got to know the general and was eventually invited to his chateau in another part of the Loire valley. I remember a long evening conversation with him. He knew I was with American intelligence and what he told me would probably get back to higher officials. This was during the runup of the Kennedy/ Nixon election and I wanted to know if de Gaulle favored Kennedy or Nixon. I was told in no uncertain terms that he favored Nixon.

Q: Kennedy was a sort of unknown lightweight at the time.

FLACK: There was also the Algerian thing when Kennedy supported the Algerian resistance against the French. Kennedy was not well liked in France for meddling in French domestic affairs.

Q: Yes, as senator he made a mistake there.

FLACK: I think it was interesting to high ranking U.S. officials that according to a close confident of General de Gaulle, he favored Nixon in the election.

Anyway, the most interesting thing in all this was in the fall of 1960 I was having Sunday dinner with this family. The phone rang and my friend went into the next room to answer it. I could understand from her side of the conversation that it was her brother, the general. She came back, didn't say anything, and sat down. We continued conversation and she suddenly turned to me and said, “How would we immigrate to the United States?” This is a very well established aristocratic French family. I said, “What in the world would you want to immigrate to the United States for?” She didn't answer. She said, “Well, I am just thinking how would we go about doing this?” When I started reflecting on this it was clear

that her brother had given her some information that put that family in danger politically. This was at the time of all the rumblings in Algeria and I later learned that the general had given his sister warning to get out of the country in case things went badly. So the general, through his sister and me, gave the U.S. government and intelligence authorities confirmation of a coup attempt by the generals in Algeria, which he was involved in.

Q: This was the generals revolt.

FLACK: That's right. This was the first clear indication that I was able to get and pass on that confirmed this. It was kind of the last piece of the puzzle that fit in and said, “Yes, this is really going to happen,” which indeed it did and it failed. The general was arrested but the family did not suffer but were under a lot of pressure at that point. They had a younger son who was a radical, sort of loose canon type, who I had to at one point dissuade from joining in an attempt to assassinate de Gaulle.

These were activities I was involved in as a lowly sergeant, at that time. It was an extremely interesting and exciting experience for me. They wanted me to stay on in CIC but I didn't want to make my career there. I was discharged in September, 1960 and went back and started doing some graduate work at the University of Minnesota. To step back, I had met a wonderful girl in Saumur who I went out with during the time I was there. After I returned to the United States, I decided I really couldn't get along without her, proposed, went back, and we were married. So, my wife is from Saumur. We returned to the States and at that point. I had to find a job.

Q: Before we leave this French time. This was during the beginning of de Gaulle's time. What was your impression of the French attitude, of the people you were dealing with?

FLACK: In general, I guess, they were highly supportive of de Gaulle. I was involved in watching the communist party in my local region, which, of course, was anti-de Gaulle. There was a right wing populist movement at the time in France headed by a man called Poujade. The members were the small shopkeepers and people who felt they were being

marginalized, etc. This was a party that was anti de Gaulle that was on the right. The vast center of the French political spectrum, I think, supported de Gaulle. As far as views of the U.S., it was far more anti-American then than it is now. There was far less known about the United States in terms of its society. One of the things that soured American relations with France at that time was the existence of our bases all through France. Saumur is a town of 20,000 and with an American base in town, the GIs would hang out in several local bars. The MP patrol actually patrolled the streets of Saumur in their Chevrolets. So you had this situation of almost an occupation of the U.S. Army. A lot of French saw it that way. Although the money the GIs spent was good for the local economy, it engendered quite a lot of anti-Americanism. This was true all through France in towns where we had American bases.

Q: How about the communists? Was it a major group where you were?

FLACK: Saumur is more of a conservative area. It is agricultural rather than industrial. It is wine, mushrooms and a bit of small industry. The Germans had been there, of course, and had set up a torpedo factory. So, the region was known as a conservative, even almost a collaborationist area during the Second World War. The communist party was not strong there but there was a communist party that had meetings and rallies and newspaper. It was not a major thing that I was seriously concerned with except when we found that the French workers at the base were members. That, of course, was a problem.

Q: What could you do?

FLACK: We would ask them and if they were members we wouldn't hire them. However, there were some party members who said they were not a member and we would hire them. We knew of these and I would watch them. Part of my job was to detect these people and try to neutralize them in the sense of getting them fired or getting them out of any positions that would give them access to sensitive information.

Q: You were a private first class in civilian clothes. Were you able to have any contact with the base command hierarchy to say such and such was impacting on the town, etc.?

FLACK: Yes. On a regular basis I saw the colonel who commanded the base. I attended his staff meeting. It was kind of like being on the staff of an ambassador. I gave him regular reports on what was going on from my point of view. But, my chain of command was to the CIC field office in Poitiers. Once a week I would drive to Poitiers for a meeting with the staff. That is where my reporting went. It went through Poitiers and then on up to Orleans and then to the main headquarters, which I think was in Fountainbleu. So, my reporting channels were different than the base's, but nevertheless I had a relationship with the base commander. It was a little bit like the CIA would be with an ambassador where reporting goes directly back to CIA but the ambassador is kept informed. That is the kind of relationship I had with the commanding officer.The base commander was fully aware of the problems caused by the American military presence, but back in those days that was a minor element of the overall fight against communism. You looked at the big picture of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, the threat to Europe and the United States, and the fact that people in small towns like Saumur might be upset about American troops was really a minor thing.

Q: This was before de Gaulle was hitting us very hard, wasn't it?

FLACK: Yes, this was before he removed the bases which I believe he did in 1962 and I was gone by then. But, he was unhappy with our bases there and it really burned him up that foreign troops were on French soil. From a nationalistic point of view I can understand that. For the mayor of this little town having American MPs drive around in their Chevrolets patrolling the streets was a strange situation and not very nice.

Q: I know having been one of these both in Japan and Germany as an enlisted man that it didn't work very well. The NATO pull out ordered by de Gaulle was done by Lyndon Johnson so it had to be 1964 probably.

FLACK: Yes, it was probably a little later than I said.

Q: Then, you got out in 1960.

FLACK: Yes and went back and did a little graduate work at thUniversity of Minnesota.

Q: In what field?

FLACK: Basically I didn't know what I was doing. I took a philosophy course and a business course. I was a full time student for one quarter. My mind was elsewhere. I was going to return to Saumur to get married, bring my wife back and find a job. I did not want to go back into the retail business. I didn't necessarily want to go back into the business area. I did find a job working for Montgomery Ward, which I considered temporary, but it gave me enough income so that I could get married.

In the meantime when I was looking for a job and was up in Duluth, I stopped by the Minnesota State's Employment Office where I filled out the forms. The guy who was reading my form told me there was a representative from the State Department a few weeks earlier. He said, “You sound like someone they might be interested in. I have some stuff here about the Foreign Service.” He rummaged through a drawer and came up with some brochures about the Foreign Service. Well, at that point, my experience with the Foreign Service was extremely limited. But, basically back in those days the Foreign Service was east coast, Ivy League and an impenetrable fortress professionally.

Q: Money.

FLACK: Yes. I even remember one time in Paris when I was in the CIC, walking into the embassy because somebody told me I could go and have lunch there. I went over to the receptionist and said, “I am here to have lunch. Could you tell me where the cafeteria is?” She looked at me and said, “But, who are you?” She was a lovely woman, kind of a blond French woman who had been at that post for years and years, and I remember coming

back to Paris once years later when I was acting permanent representative in Geneva and she didn't remember me but she called me “Monsieur le Ministre” and I thought, “Ah ha, she finally knows who I am.”

So, back then this was my impression of the Foreign Service, but I took the information and on reading it I realized there was an entrance examination, and thought it was interesting. So, I signed up for the exam. I almost didn't take the exam because between the time I sent in my application and the exam date, I proposed to my wife and I knew I was going to be marrying a foreign national. It was clear that you couldn't come into the Foreign Service if your wife was not an American citizen. I had decided not to take the exam. But, it so happened it was given in Minneapolis and it also happened that a friend of mine was giving a party that weekend and I decided that since I was going to be there and I had the ticket for the exam I might as well take it. So, I took the exam and then totally put it out of my mind. Not only did I think I flunked it when I walked out, but I thought even if I passed it I really wasn't interested. I took it out of curiosity.

Well, lo and behold, I got a letter a month later saying I had passed the exam and containing material about the oral examination. Well, at this point I began to get more interested because I knew I had passed the written and felt I should look into it further before I let it drop. I started asking people about it and they all told me I had no chance because my wife will be a foreign national and she can't become an American citizen for three years. I didn't resolve it but signed up for the oral anyway.

Q: Where was the oral?

FLACK: In St. Paul. There were a couple of interesting things about the oral. They had you write an autobiography. Well, mine was kind of interesting. I had just finished reading de Gaulle's memoirs, which he wrote in the third person. So, for the fun of it, I wrote mine in the third person. The first thing they started talking about was my autobiography. One interviewer said, “Why did you write it in the third person?” I said, “Well, I had just read

de Gaulle's memoirs and decided to do it in the third person." He said, "Well, that is kind of interesting, but did de Gaulle slip into the first person occasionally like you do?" My interview was basically about French wines and de Gaulle. And, surprisingly, again at the end, they told me I had passed. I told them that my wife was French and I probably won't be able to come in. He said, "That is not our problem. We won't even talk to you about that. You have to work that out."

At this point I got really interested. I called up my senator's office, Senator Humphrey, and explained to one of his assistants my problem. I said that I really had a good chance of coming into the Foreign Service but I was marrying a French national and the rules say she has to be an American citizen before I can come in. Was there any way around this? A few weeks later I got a very nice letter back signed by Senator Humphrey but obviously done by one of his staffers saying that there was a precedent of an officer who is currently serving in the Service. The precedent said that a wife is made an American citizen expeditiously on the basis that she is going to be sent overseas and therefore can't stay in the U.S. This was done before one came into the Foreign Service so that when you did come into the Foreign Service your wife was an American citizen. This had been done before and I was to take this up with the INS. I did and they reluctantly agreed. My wife was naturalized on, I think it was Valentine's Day, and the next day we took off for Washington and I was sworn into the Foreign Service about a week later. It was kind of an unusual set of circumstances.

Q: It certainly is. What did your wife think about coming to the United States and finding out she was going to be in the Foreign Service?

FLACK: This was also very strange and I must say I give her credit. She was very young at the time, only 20. She couldn't even legally drink in the United States when she came here and was very shocked at that. When I was going out in France, of course, she knew that I was a CIC agent. This was not something that was a secret. Everybody knew I was in intelligence. When we came back I had this job with Montgomery Ward and she settled

into life in Minneapolis for a while. She was, however, very interested and encouraged me to go into the Foreign Service because obviously she liked the idea of foreign travel and living abroad as the wife of an American diplomat. She was a little intimidated by it and my first assignment in the Foreign Service was Athens, because of her, actually. She was the one who wanted to go to Greece because she had studied classical Greek.When we arrived in Athens she was very nervous about being a 21 year old French girl at the American embassy. The ambassador at the time was Henry Labouisse, whose wife was Eve Curie, the daughter of Madame Curie and author of a famous biography of her mother. So, when Daniele went to call on Eve Labouisse, extremely nervous, she put her at ease immediately by speaking only in French. She explained that there was a small French club at the embassy there composed of two other wives and herself, who meet every other week to do this or that together. Of course she immediately put my wife totally at ease. The ambassador's wife was French and Athens was very francophone at that time.

Q: Back to coming into the Foreign Service, can you talk a littlbit about your basic officers course?

FLACK: The A100 course was quite a good size. Chester Beaman, who I later worked for in Manila, was one of our instructors and the other one's name escapes me at the moment. At that time, FSI was in the garage at the Arlington Towers and we rented in the Arlington Towers when we came to Washington. While I took the A100 course, Daniele started part-time teaching an early morning French class at FSI.

Some of my classmates were Ruth Held, who later married Martin van Heuven and is still in the Service, Tom Niles, and Bob Berry. I can't think of anything particular I can say about the class. It was an interesting experience but not something that has stuck in my mind as being extraordinary. I found my colleagues to be less “Ivy League” than I had expected.

Q: Did you get a feel that the Foreign Service is a little different than you imagined it to be back when you first thought about the Foreign Service?

FLACK: In a sense, yes, because I was far less intimidated with people than I thought I was going to be. Having had the experience in France gave me a background that didn't make me feel quite as inexperienced or less worldly than some of these kids who had just gotten out of college. Tom Niles, for example, had just gotten out of Harvard and was 22.

Q: His first job was Yugoslavia and I was his boss. He was a veryoung 22.

FLACK: That's right. One thing I remember about Tom is very funny. We talked about our careers and how we were going to develop them and I remember him telling me at one point, “I am going to program 20 percent of my time on career enhancement. I want 20 percent of my day being spent doing things that will be good for my career.” He obviously did very well with that formula.

Q: Your first post was Athens. You served in Athens from when twhen?

FLACK: From 1963 to 1965. But, let me go back a bit. There is one thing I want to mention. After I finished A100 I went to Greek language training but before it started I had a hiatus of several months and they didn't know what to do with me. At that point you may remember that counterinsurgency was the big thing. Kennedy was in office and Bobby Kennedy, in particular, was very interested in this and the Pentagon was interested. There was Castro and Vietnam. Well, I was attached to a group building a counterinsurgency course here at FSI. Landon, whose wife wrote “The King and I,” was the head of this group and a very interesting fellow. We got the material together and did a bibliography. So, I was there at its inception and also, because I was involved in it, attended the first counterinsurgency course. I was sitting in the back auditing it, of course, I wasn't a member of the course, and went to the opening reception at the brand new diplomatic reception rooms. The vice president was there, Dean Rusk, Bobby Kennedy,

the Secretary of Defense and everybody who was anybody in town. I remember as a junior officer just in training being overwhelmed with the personalities present.

Q: Could you tell me a bit more about this counterinsurgency course? What was the concept, the drive and what you were trying to do?

FLACK: This was the subject of the day. It was the buzz word around Washington and we had carte blanche in setting up this thing and it was really kind of exciting. I was responsible for setting up the library for the course. We were getting copies of everything that revolutionaries had ever written.

Q: The complete works of Mao Tse-tung.

FLACK: Almost, yes. But the ones that were of greater interest were people like Frantz Fanon, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. Their writings were available and usually small things. They talked about communism, about revolution, about insurgency and their tactics, plans and strategies. This type of book, was the heart of the course, to get these senior officials of the U.S. government as well Foreign Service to understand where these people were coming from. So, one part of the course was to talk about insurgency, about revolution and the mentality of the leaders, etc. The second part, as I recall, was basically talking about the current situation and a little bit of history like the revolution in the Philippines, etc. The third part was how do you counter insurgency? There you got into a lot more military stuff, but there was a lot of psychology and diplomacy involved in that, too.

Q: Was the attitude positive or defensive? Was there a kind of feeling that this was a force that was underway and we had to do something about it?

FLACK: I think the idea was that this was a terrible problem and we were finally going to do something about it. We were finally going to get our act together and get some strategy

for countering it. There was a hopeful feeling that we were going to get to the bottom of this thing by those preparing and having senior decisionmakers take the course.

Q: Was there anything on working on the conditions that would causrevolutionary governments to flourish?

FLACK: Yes, there were a number of lectures by AID and the Peace Corps and anything you could think of that would influence economic conditions in poor countries was talked about in one way or another.

Q: Then you...

FLACK: Then I went to Greek language. My wife continued teaching French while I was learning Greek. I found that to be a very, very difficult thing to do. Whereas my French language training had gone very well, I felt my Greek language training did not go well. I found it very difficult. But, nevertheless, I did it and I still have a 3/3 in Greek. I went off to Athens assigned as a rotational junior officer in 1963.

Q: You arrived there when in 1963?

FLACK: It was in the spring. I think March. The ambassador was Henry Labouisse and the prime minister was Karamanlis. I was immediately assigned to the Administrative Section for a month or two. Then I was assigned to the economic section. One of the officers was going on home leave and so I was there several months. And, then, of course, I did the rest of my tour, eighteen months or so, in the consular section as vice consul on visas.

Q: You are now a full-fledged Foreign Service officer. How did yosee the political situation in Greece at that time?

FLACK: Being a junior officer and not being involved, except very rarely, in what was going on at the ambassadorial or even counselor of embassy level, I felt perhaps a little bit left out. I think the Service does a much better job now including junior officers, for example,

on a rotational basis at staff meetings and things like that. That wasn't done back then and you really felt like you were a junior officer not having any contact with the upper levels of the embassy.

I had Greek language training and we got an apartment right in the town center where the politicians and professionals lived - a wonderful place to live but most Americans didn't want to live there, they lived out in the suburbs. My wife and I have always been city people and wanted to live in town. Because of where we lived we became very close to a lot of Greeks, not necessarily people from the foreign office, but our neighbors and people we met through our neighbors. They were all very influential Greeks in professional positions. They were older than we were, but nevertheless were very interested and flattered to have an American embassy person at their parties, etc. So, somehow we got involved in a social circuit that other Americans at the embassy were not involved in. From that point of view I think I had a different view of Greek politics and what was going on in the country that frankly was never called upon. I was never involved in any way in policy discussions. Greek politics to me at that time were new, but some things never change. There is the constant Turkish question. While I was in Athens, Kennedy was assassinated and a few months later King Paul died. So, there were two periods of mourning and two traumatic experiences. The Greeks, by the way, were far more traumatized and showed far more grief about Kennedy's death than they did about their own king.

Q: I was in Yugoslavia and the whole country went into mourning.

FLACK: Yes, it was absolutely extraordinary. Of course, King Paul was old and sick and it was expected while Kennedy's was sudden and dramatic. Nevertheless I was struck by the fact they were more affected by Kennedy's death than King Paul's. Constantine became king while we were there. I had seen him a couple of times because when he was Crown Prince Constantine he used to go out to the base and play handball. He was a kind of man about town. He had a little Mercedes convertible.

The prime minister, I think, was very effective. Constantine Karamanlis, who I had met on a couple of occasions was extraordinarily capable. I had certain opinions about Ambassador Labouisse's capabilities but being a junior officer without much experience I doubted them. Frankly I didn't think he was very effective.

Q: I think these impressions are important. What was there abouhim and his work that made you think this?

FLACK: He did not give the impression of being forceful or effective in dealings with the Greeks from my point of view, which as I said probably was not very informed. He was not particularly well treated or respected in the press. He was simply the American ambassador. There had been a story going around, that he had been the head of AID and had screwed it up so badly they had to get him out of town, so Kennedy sent him to Greece. This is what was in the Greek press and I don't know if it was true or not. So, his credibility was not all that great. Although they loved his wife. They thought she was wonderful. She was more prominent in many ways than he was. My view at that point was not terribly favorable but as I said, and I still believe this, I was not really in a position to judge what was going on.

Q: Did you feel a tendency of the Greeks to place greater prominence to the role of the United States in what was happening in Greece than an American would? I was there during a very difficult time, from 1970-74. If there was an earthquake it was the Americans' responsibility. Did you sense this?

FLACK: Absolutely, there was an enormous American presence in Greece. There were the bases, an AID program, and a military assistance program. Given the state of Greece after World War II and the fact that Harry Truman really saved the country economically, so to speak, there was an enormous American presence, and I would say the Greeks did not really exaggerate our importance in the country. We did have an enormous amount of power and influence. I think they have never really gotten over that. I think we have far

less now than we had then, but the Greeks continue to believe that we are running their country. But, this is a kind of syndrome that I see all over the world. All over the world where I have served, the locals believe that the United States is far more powerful than we really are.

Q: I think it was quadrupled in Greece. While you were enjoying coffee with your Greek friends in the local cafes did George Papandreou's name come up much?

FLACK: Yes. Andreas was around also. I mentioned being in the Economic Section while an officer was on home leave. I remember, the first day I sat down I looked down and under the glass top she had cards from various people she knew and one of them was Andreas Papandreou when he was in Berkeley. I remember thinking he was probably the son of George and asking about him.

George Papandreou was the major opposition force, extraordinarily active and, of course, he was the man to watch. He was the person the political section was totally obsessed with and was trying to follow. I think one of the reasons we had such bad relations with PASOK over the years was from the very beginning with George Papandreou was that the CIA was so involved in trying to watch and influence the political scene and minimize his power.

Q: My impression when I was in Greece was that we had in a way, because of the difficulty of the language, far too many Greek Americans in the military and in the CIA who tended to be 110 percent American and 110 percent conservative and they helped sort of influence our whole attitude towards the left there which George Papandreou led. I found that the Greek-speaking establishment in the CIA and in our military came from small towns up in the hills.

FLACK: I agree with you on that. You know at that time the Department of State had this rule where if you or your wife were from the country or had close ties there, you were not assigned there because they felt there would be undue pressures and properly so,

especially in Greece. And, yet, the other agencies in the government felt the opposite, that they would take advantage of the language abilities in assignments. The Department has changed over the years about that.

Q: Then you went into the consular section.

FLACK: Yes, doing visas for the last eighteen months. That was an extraordinary experience also because at that time we had a waiting list of people to immigrate to the United States. I think there were 150,000 people on the waiting list. Because of that there were an enormous number of people coming in trying to get visitor visas who were not real visitors. So, my refusal rate was about 35 percent. It was kind of difficult because you were making very serious decisions about people's lives every day. On the busiest day I ever had I think I had a hundred interviews. So, it was very busy, very fast moving and you had to be very decisive and make decisions quickly. Of course, some of the decisions came back to haunt you because either you made the wrong decision and gave them the visa and then in six months or a year later INS reports would come back saying they had changed status, etc. Or, you refused a visa and the uncle in Chicago writes to his congressman and you get the letter from the congressman saying, “Why did you refuse a visa to Miss so-and-so?” The ambassador had a rule through the consul general on congressionals consisting of a standard form letter to be sent back that I signed on the first request. If the congressman wrote a second time, the consul general would write back again saying no. If a third congressional came in the ambassador said to just give the visa. Of course, nobody knew that. We didn't want to tell the congressmen that if they wrote three times they would get a visa, but basically that was what happened.

Q: What was your impression of the clientele who were coming in?Were they city folk or town folk?

FLACK: The people I were refusing were the classic refusal cases of unmarried young people from the countryside with no work and no money who were going to visit their uncle

in Chicago who just happened to have a restaurant, etc. Maybe their marriage was already arranged, or they were going to work, who knows what it was going to be, but the rules are they have to show a good reason to return to Greece and if they didn't have family ties or property or money or some reason to return, we would refuse the visa.

Q: Were seamen a problem? The Greeks had these huge tanker fleets.

FLACK: Of course we did crew list visas but we did have a lot of problems because these people would jump ship, or on an individual basis occasionally they would want to have visas. I remember the captain of a ship that was coming in who tried to get a visa for his new wife who was a young woman. In researching this I found out that she was already married. He didn't know this and I had to tell him. I showed him the documents and said, “You didn't mention that your wife was previously married?” He looked at me and I continued, “As far as I can see she still is?” He looked at the documents, turned white and left the office. His wife had two husbands at that time.

Q: You left Greece then in 1965.

FLACK: That's right and I was assigned to Manila.

Q: When you left Greece did you think you were leaving a countrwith a stable government?

FLACK: Yes, I must say I did. I didn't have any inkling of a brewing coup or problems of such a serious nature that that would happen. But, again, as I said I was a junior officer in the Consular Section and wasn't involved in political aspects of Greece. However, the monarchy was being called into question. There was a very young king at that time who was being manipulated by his mother, Queen Frederika.

On the other hand, I was also involved in his wedding to Ann Marie of Denmark. Lyndon Johnson sent his daughter, Lynda Bird, and I was her control officer. So, I spent a lot of

time with her. I have a couple of very amusing stories about Lynda Bird and that wedding. She was, I think, eighteen and very young and impressionable. A sweet kid but just very, very immature at that point. She was with the chief of protocol, Angie Biddle Duke and his wife, Robin, who were kind of her chaperons. The control office was next to her room and she was always hanging out eating peanut butter sandwiches with her hair up in curlers.

At one point, I got a phone call from somebody in the Greek press wanting to know what Lynda Bird was going to wear at the wedding. So, I asked her and she said that it was over in the closet and to go look at it. I go over and see this beautiful white dress with a rhinestone belt, etc. and describe it to the press. It said in the press the next day that she was going to wear this dress. Then I get a call from Eleanor Dulles, who was in town for the wedding, and she said, “I just saw in the paper that Lynda Bird is going to wear a white dress.” I said, “Yes.” She said, “She can't do that.” I thought for a minute and realized she was probably right, that you don't wear a white dress to somebody else's wedding and said, “Well, that may be true, but I am just reporting what I see.” She said, “Well, you have to do something. If Lynda Bird wears that dress to the wedding, there will be a scandal. She will be embarrassed and the President will be embarrassed. You have to do something.”

I didn't know what to do but talked to Lynda Bird about it saying, “Isn't there something about not wearing a white dress to a wedding?” She got very angry and said, “There is nothing wrong with a white dress. Besides we asked the embassy if there was anything we shouldn't do and shouldn't wear and they didn't say anything about not wearing a white dress.” I said, “Okay, okay.” Then I approached Mrs. Duke. Mrs. Duke said, “I helped Lynda Bird buy that dress. I picked it out for her. There is absolutely nothing wrong with her wearing that dress to the wedding.” So, I just let it go.

However, Mrs. Dulles called back and asked what happened, had I done something. I said that Lynda Bird had said nobody had told her she shouldn't wear a white dress and Robin Duke had helped her pick it out. Eleanor Dulles said something very nasty. She

said, “Robin Duke doesn't have a pedigree and doesn't know what she is doing and you have to do something, she can't wear that dress to the wedding.” Frankly I agreed with her over the dress although I wouldn't tell her that I agreed with her.

I could see that there was trouble brewing. So, I went to the ambassador, Labouisse, who said, “I can't get involved in things like this.” I talked to Angie Biddle Duke, who was the chief of protocol, and he said he wasn't going to get involved in this, to talk to his wife. Well, I had already done that. The administratiave counselor's name was Bernie Rosen and I got a hold of him and said that I didn't know what to do. He said, “Well, let's you and I go to Lynda Bird and talk to her and see what will happen.” So, we had a long session with Lynda Bird and Mrs. Duke and we did convince them that this was the wrong thing to do. So, Robin Duke gave her dress to Lynda Bird and Eleanor Dulles was happy.

The next day the original reporter called back to ask why did I say Lynda Bird was going to wear the dress I described and which he had printed, when she wore a different dress. Mrs. Duke was right next to me when that call came in and I had my hand over the phone and said, “This is the journalist about that white dress report. What do I tell him?” Mrs. Duke looked at me and said, “You know perfectly well that Lynda Bird never intended to wear a white dress to that wedding,” and turned around and walked away. I simply said to the fellow that I was sorry and had made a mistake.

Q: Before we leave this, did you get any feeling how the Greeks felabout Queen Frederika, who was very powerful?

FLACK: The whole royal family, you know, were not considered by the Greeks to be Greek. They were Germans and were considered to be such. So, the monarchy, as such, was not terribly popular, even among the most conservative supporters of Karamanlis. There were a few what I would call really monarchists, but for the most part the Greek upper class and professional classes were neutral to anti in terms of the royal family. There was not a lot of support there.

Q: Then you went off to Manila for how long?

FLACK: For two years from 1965 to 1967. I was there for the Marcos election. I was assigned as commercial officer in the Commercial Section, working for the commercial counselor whose name was Joe Rand. It was a junior job doing commercial work but again we didn't want to live out in the suburbs where everybody else lived. We lived in one of the old fashioned prewar compounds in the center of Pasay, not far from the embassy. It was a series of about 10 old wooden houses that had survived World War II so they were old fashioned prewar colonial houses with an enormous amount of charm. I was the only American in the neighborhood. There was one family from the British embassy across the street from us but we were not far from the ambassador's residence at that point.

My work there as commercial officer was uneventful, but my tour there was eventful, we had lots of things happening. First of all, there was the Macapagal and Marcos election and Marcos won. He was the J F Kennedy of the Philippines. He was a young hero, a war hero, and everybody thought this was the revolution that was going to change the country. Everybody was very excited about what he was going to do, including the American embassy. We were supportive. They were a young attractive couple. I met them on one occasion and was impressed with Imelda as an extraordinarily beautiful, very tall and elegant woman. So, it was kind of an exciting time. I left long before all the problems started in terms of his second election, etc. But, I have often thought how sad it was that he was corrupted because at the point he was elected I think he was genuinely a sincere, young, revolutionary type politician who wanted to do well for his country. I think he was corrupted by politics and power.

Q: What was the situation in the Philippines during the time yowere there?

FLACK: Well, it was an underdeveloped country. It was starting to come up a bit. There was a brewing unrest in the south, in Mindanao and uprising in Moslem areas of the country. There was the memory of the post World War II insurgency, the Huk

revolution, which was put down and which was a subject of the counterintelligence course I mentioned previously, so I knew something about it at that point. The thing that struck me was how the Filipinos often in conversations went back to the 1900 period, the war against the Americans and how we won that. I hadn't realized before going to the Philippines that this was the key element in their history. It wasn't World War II, it was being colonized by America, being taken from Spain in the early 1900s. There is a book about the Philippines called “Little Brown Brother” that was written by an American, but was one of these terribly patronizing books that the Filipinos would use and recite all the time as the reason why they really hated American domination. I remember an influential Filipino telling me in response to another Filipino saying, “You know we should be an American state. We would be a lot better off.” This fellow said, “Filipinos would rather live in hell run by Filipinos than in heaven run by Americans.” They felt very, very strongly about this.

Q: In Manila, did you find the American embassy community tended to line up with those who thought the United States was great, etc.? Did they have good feelers out at that time?

FLACK: I think the embassy was doing a good job in keeping in contact with the opposition and with what was going on. However, at that time Marcos was so strong and newly elected that most of the efforts of the embassy were concentrated on his administration. But there is a book publisher in Manila, F. Jos# (Frankie), who was a friend of mine. He had a book store and his publishing office, called the Solidaridad Press, on a street where the foreign ministry is located. It was easy walking distant from the embassy and there were a few of us that got to know him. His office was above the book store and he called it the upper room. It was like a big library with tables, coffee, his desk in one corner. When you had an extra hour to kill you would go over and go up to the upper room and talk to Frankie Jose about what was going on. It was really interesting. There were a couple of other officers in the embassy who did that. My job as commercial officer involved me much

more with the business community so we had a different view than those officers who were more involved with the political community.

Q: Which way was business going then? What were you trying to dthen?

FLACK: We were trying to increase American exports to the Philippines, promote American investment in the Philippines or help Americans who were trying to invest in the Philippines. In terms of the reverse, to try to get the Filipinos to invest in the U.S., it was practically non-existent. Basically our job was reporting to the Departments of Commerce and State on business conditions. We would help trade missions coming in, individual companies seeking agents or information about the market for a particular product.

Q: Were there many restrictions on Americans investing or selling tthe Philippines?

FLACK: I don't recall that there were. It was pretty open. The main problem was, as in most developing countries, that it was very difficult to get their money back out. Once the money came in the repatriation of capital was a problem. But, it wasn't something that couldn't be surmounted like it was in Greece. The Greeks were terrible on the repatriation of capital.

Q: Going back to your old trade as a visa officer, I assume anyone connected with the embassy would be hit by Filipinos trying to get a niece or somebody into the United States. Was this a problem?

FLACK: It wasn't a problem because basically as a professional you knew how to handle it, but there were quite a few people who asked for such a favor. You would be at a dinner party and someone would say they had a nephew who was refused a visa and what can you do, or something like that. Basically I would say I wasn't involved in visas and give the name of a consular officer for them to contact.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

FLACK: Bill Blair, who was a very nice guy. He was a Kennedy political appointee and had been ambassador to Denmark, a socialite lawyer. Again, at that point, I was not involved in any negotiations or anything involving him. I just saw him socially and he and his wife did a beautiful job. She tended to require a lot from embassy wives which would now be totally prohibited.

Q: Did the Vietnam war intrude at all at this point?

FLACK: It was beginning to, yes. The war was going on but it was not at its height. Occasionally we would see or hear the B-52s going over and there were people on R&R coming in from Vietnam. A friend of mine, an FSO, who was serving in Vietnam, came to visit us. So, it was a distance but very real to us. The biggest thing that happened while I was in Manila was the Manila Summit conference of 1966, which was an Asia summit about the Vietnam war. Johnson came. It was a very intense negotiation and I was privy to a lot of what was going on because I was working on the arrangements for the conference. At one point when I was seating with Ambassador Blair he asked me to go out and see someone and get a piece of paper he needed. Somehow, I got to be just about the only officer in the embassy that could go in and out of the conference room. The Filipinos for what reason I don't know, recognized me as someone who needed to go back and forth. So, they didn't want me to leave. They wanted to keep me inside so they could send me out rather than outside and not be able to get me inside. So, I was in the room with the principals all the time.

Johnson was at the summit with an enormous number of people from the White House. That was the first time that I had been involved in a White House event and for the first time realized what the White House could do in terms of personnel and money. There was a final communique that they had a hard time working out. Bill Moyers was the main negotiator on this in terms of the wording of it. He did a fantastic job. So, it was probably the most important event in my two years in Manila.

Q: Did you get any feel as you sat and listened to this thing about the atmosphere? Was Johnson out pulling people in or was there unanimity?

FLACK: What happened was the conference started out in this large room where you had the heads of state and their foreign and defense ministers on either side of them, and then a bevy of people behind them. It started out with this group negotiating and very quickly on, wasn't more than an hour into the negotiations, Johnson said, “This is not working. We can't negotiate like this. Let's all go, just the heads of state and me and Moyers or somebody else to take notes, into a small room and work on it.” So, they disappeared into a side room with Moyers . The others must have had secretaries with them too, to take notes. The rest of us just sat around this big table with nothing to do for hours on end. I remember Clark Clifford going sound asleep; Dean Rusk not knowing what to do; Blair ... As I was going back and forth the security guards got to know me. One of them asked if I would take the agenda folder he had and get Ambassador Blair's autograph. I said, “Sure.” I went up to Ambassador Blair and holding out the folder said, “the security guard over there would like you to autograph this for him.” He said, “Sure” and signed the folder. Then he began going around the room and having everybody he could find autograph it for him. He came back with almost all of the foreign ministers autographs, Dean Rusk wouldn't sign it, and handed it back to me to give to the security guard. He said, “That is the most useful thing I have done all day.”

So, we sat in this room with nothing to do but could hear the shouting coming from the side room. Johnson was shouting and pounding the table. Every once and a while Moyers would stick his arm out with a piece of paper and tell me to grab it and they would start typing it and I would take it back in. They hammered out a communique on that basis.

Q: When you left there did you think the Philippines was a workindemocracy and a country that is going somewhere?

FLACK: Yes. I didn't have any negative feelings about the country when I left. I did not think it was any kind of a basket case. I suppose this is because as a commercial officer you get to know the economics of a country and you tend to make it look good for American businessmen. So, you probably tend to look more on the rosy side of the picture than on the dark side of the picture. And, it was doing pretty well at that time. The economy was coming along nicely. There was still enormous poverty but investment was coming in and there were a lot of good things happening.

Q: Where did you go after the Philippines?

FLACK: I went back to Washington on detail to the Department oCommerce.

Q: You were in Commerce from 1967 to when?

FLACK: From 1967 until 1969. It was not all in the Department of Commerce. It seems to me that was when I did the advanced economics training course for six months. But, I did leave the Department of Commerce in the middle of 1969.

Q: How did you get this Department of Commerce assignment?

FLACK: The commercial counselor, Joe Rand, urged me to go back and take a detail to the Department of Commerce working in the Asian bureau, which I did. I worked on Thai affairs from a commercial point of view. So, I was in the Far East Bureau of the Department of Commerce promoting US-Thai trade. I did a report on the Thai economy that was published. I did investment work trying to promote viable investment exchange and things like this.

Q: Did you find Commerce different in system than State?

FLACK: It was very different. Almost everybody in the Department of Commerce hated Foreign Service officers. I was constantly receiving snide remarks or outright almost

insults about the Foreign Service from people at Commerce. You would even hear it in the hall sometimes. I would walk down the hall and hear two people talking about this dumb Foreign Service officer out in so-and-so who doesn't know the first thing about this, that or the other. At that point there was a lot of animosity towards the Department of State and the Foreign Service.

Q: Why?

FLACK: I think it is the State Department's fault basically. I think State officers never really wanted to do commercial work. They looked down upon it. They thought it was something of lesser value and far lesser prestige. No one ever asks for commercial assignments. This was before the reorganization where you had the Foreign Commercial Service. This was when commercial work abroad was done by Foreign Service officers.

Q: It had been done by the Department of Commerce years before. We had one lady who was doing it from the Department of Commerce in the 1920s. I have an interview with her.

FLACK: Yes, originally the Department of Commerce had their own people abroad. Then commercial work was integrated into the Foreign Service and then in 1980 again it separated out. Now, I understand with various reorganizations that may be coming up it may fall back into the Foreign Service. But, at this time when I was in the Department of Commerce it was separate in the sense that the Department of Commerce people did not go overseas. They supported Foreign Service officers abroad and Foreign Service officers generally had a rather condescending attitude towards the Department of Commerce.

Q: When I came into the Foreign Service we had somebody from the Department of Commerce talk to my A100 course. He was so boring that to this day I remember the event.

FLACK: The major issues of the day back then were things like counterinsurgency, East-West relations, the developing world, etc. and commercial affairs were not high on the

priority list of any embassy or any ambassador, even though from time to time, at least once every two or three years, the Secretary would feel obliged to send out a letter or a cable to ambassadors saying, “Commercial work really is important. You are the chief salesman of the U.S. government in your country. So, pay attention to this.” It got to be a boilerplate letter that was sent out every few years and nobody did anything about it.

Q: As a Foreign Service officer going in, having this group of people who are not permitted because of the system to go overseas themselves, handling the sales promotion in the United States, did you find a problem with the Department of Commerce people understanding the real world out there of how to sell?

FLACK: Yes, to a certain extent. Although, the desk officers in the Department of Commerce did travel to their areas on trade missions, orientation trips, etc., so, there was a connection. But, they certainly were not on the spot living the daily life of the commercial officer abroad. That they didn't do. That made a difference for them. The State Department officers that were working at these jobs were often assigned there because somehow they fell into it because they lost the job they wanted. It was a second or third choice in most cases.

Q: You were working on Thai affairs. Can you talk about how the system worked in the Department of Commerce about doing something about Thailand?

FLACK: Well, it was a very bureaucratic arrangement, much like the Department of State. There was the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs within what is now the International Trade Administration, but it had a different name then. We were broken down by region and within regions by desk. The larger desks, like Japan, had perhaps two or three officers. I was by myself on the Thai desk. There was a director and deputy director of each bureau who were people who seemed to spend most of their time in meetings. It was a very bureaucratic and not very creative arrangement. I didn't really care for that work in the Department of Commerce. It was all right, but I was not terribly happy with it.

Q: What were trade relations like with Thailand?

FLACK: At the time they were going very well. The Thai economy was developing rapidly. This was back in the late sixties. It was still considered to be a developing country but was developing fast. It was one of the rising stars of the region. But, there was not nearly the level of investment or business that there is now.

We were doing things like promoting U.S. trade missions to Thailand to talk with business people. It was a good time. I can't think of any particular problems.

Q: Did rice play any role? We have the Ellenders of Louisiana and others pushing rice and the Thais are rice exporters. Did that ever cross your threshold?

FLACK: Not really. Only in the sense that I would read the reporting on it sometimes, but basically because that was an agricultural issue it was handled by the Department of Agriculture and to a minor degree the Departments of Commerce and State.

Q: This is a period of tremendous investment on our part in the area because of our war in Vietnam and Thailand was a bomber base for us and we had a lot of stuff in there. Did we find that this helped or hindered our commercial program there?

FLACK: I can't say that it hindered it. If any thing, it probably helped it simply because it raised the level of awareness in the American business community of Thailand and what was going on there. And, of course, a lot of private firms were doing business related to the military activities there, so there were contractors and all sorts of other people there working which contributed to building the base of a more intense relationship.

Q: I have been essentially a consular officer but every time I have come across bits of commercial work I have heard this complaint from the Foreign Service side. We are talking about the fifties, sixties and seventies. Yes, there are trade opportunities but American firms were not interested in developing them particularly because they had the huge

American market and maybe some European ties. One of the things you felt was that the American establishment in the Departments of Commerce and State was trying to get American firms to go out there and do something. Did you have that feeling?

FLACK: Yes. Let me say a few words about the relationship between the Department of State, the Department of Commerce and the American business community first, which you kind of alluded to. I mentioned before that the Department of Commerce people were highly critical of the Foreign Service and the State Department people looked down with condescension upon the activities of the Department of Commerce. However, you had a third element which was the American business community. Now, you may remember when we switched over to the Foreign Commercial Service in 1980, the main reason Congress got involved in this was they felt the business community was not being adequately served by the Foreign Service, and they weren't, that is true. Part of it was that the Foreign Service very often simply put it on a secondary level, and would down play the importance of it. They wouldn't really see, very often, the importance of a certain investment or trade. Secondly, the Department of Commerce people I think actively encouraged the private sector to be critical of the Foreign Service in this respect. In other words, they would sit down with business people and say, “Oh, these dumb Foreign Service officers don't know what they are doing out there.” And, the business people would pick that up and take it back to their congressman. So, I think part of the disconnect there was actually kind of sabotage, if you like, from certain levels in the Department of Commerce. And, of course, you had Foreign Service officers doing commercial work who were not enthusiastic about it and doing second-rate work.

Now, to get back to the interest in Thailand. One of the things that we did have there was a very active US trade center in Bangkok where we would have about once a month a trade show around a theme. We would send out US firms, usually small firms, their first time in exporting, looking for an agent for their particular product. These shows were actually very successful and instrumental in introducing a lot of small American firms at a very basic

level to foreign markets and particularly in Bangkok. The Bangkok trade center was a very successful one.

Q: How did you find the Thai system worked with American exports? Some countries, Japan being the prime example, have a whole series of rules and customs that almost preclude foreign investments.

FLACK: Back in those days I didn't get this feeling in Thailand at all. Certainly there were the usual problems in exporting to Thailand, but I don't recall any great criticism of the government on protectionism or unfair rules, etc. It wasn't a completely open system but it certainly was not the protectionist environment that you have had in recent years in Japan, for example.

Q: What was your impression of the ability of the Department oCommerce to go out and generate interest in people exporting?

FLACK: Generally I thought it was pretty good. I have always felt that the Department of Commerce programs that were in place then and I think largely are today, of identifying trade opportunities and sending them back to Washington to have them published and sending out trade missions and trade lists of local companies. These were useful documents that were generally available to U.S. business. If I had any criticism of the Department of Commerce in that respect, it was at the field office level throughout the U.S. I thought there was a poor interface between the field office and the Department of Commerce and certainly with the Foreign Service. If a company in Minneapolis wanted to do business in Thailand, if it was thinking correctly, they would go through the Department of Commerce field office in Minneapolis. They would go in there and say, “I'm interested in finding an agent in Thailand.” Well, they have information there and if they didn't they could get it from the Department of Commerce. But, this type of service was not generally known and appreciated by the business community. So, I think there was poor public relations on

the part of the Department of Commerce to let the business community know all of this is there for them. I think that problem still exists to a certain degree.

Q: While you were in the Department of Commerce did you have any contact with your economic counterparts at the Thai desk in the State Department?

FLACK: I would call the contacts minimal. Again, the fact that there was a Thai desk at the Department of Commerce for the State Department people was of very little interest. I probably came over to the State Department a handful of times, perhaps, to talk to people. They just basically weren't interested. There was not a close relationship. In any case, policy was made in the State Department.

Q: I take it then that you felt pretty isolated.

FLACK: Yes and no. I began to be taken into the Department of Commerce culture, so to speak. Let me tell you, when Department of Commerce people traveling abroad or when commercial officers abroad came back to Washington on consultations or home leave or reassignment, it was really amazing the way they were treated by the Department of Commerce. Far better than the Department of State treated their people coming back. I remember coming back from Manila at one point from some kind of a consultation, I walked into the office that took care of people coming back and there was a big board there on the wall with all incoming officers' names listed. My name was up there. They had a desk set aside for me. All my messages were there. They had typed up my schedule for me, what I was going to be doing. In other words, it was organized and efficient. Nothing like that happens to you when you come back to the Department of State unless you are an ambassador, of course. But, even junior commercial officers would come back to this Department of Commerce office and be treated like someone very important, and we were to those people. Not to the Department of State, but to the Department of Commerce. I always said back at that time that I wished the Department of State had a way of receiving returning and consulting officers as good as the Department of Commerce.

Q: This, of course, is one of the problems. In a way we are trying to do this with our oral history program by debriefing people. We may be reaching back fifty years but we are still doing it and putting it together which is seldom done in the State Department. Did you go or get involved in any trade missions?

FLACK: No, not while I was there. I did no traveling that I carecall while I was in that job in the Department of Commerce.

Q: Did you get involved in setting up trade missions?

FLACK: Yes. We would work on contacting U.S. firms to participate in trade mission and also contacting U.S. firms to recruit them for trade shows at the trade center in Bangkok. I did quite a bit of that. That was deadline work. The show is going to be on March 15 and by January 15 you had to have all the names of all the participants so that in Bangkok they could start promoting the show, printing brochures, etc. There was a certain amount of pressure to it and selling. Basically I was selling participation in a show at the U.S. trade center to American businesses.

Q: What was your impression of the response of American businessethat you would call about participating?

FLACK: I would say surprising positive. We were basically after small firms and firms that had not been active in exporting, at least not in Asia. I found them surprisingly receptive. Usually I was talking to the president of the company. Some of these companies had four or five employees and some had 20-30 or maybe a 100. So, you usually talked to the president of the company because he would be the one who would make the decision to participate or not in a trade show. Generally I found these people being very much interested in exporting. They knew it was important to them if they wanted to increase their overall sales. They felt generally positive and curious about the trade center system and how it worked. So, it was a receptive audience, generally.

Q: Did you feel any change when there was a change between the Johnson Administration and the Nixon Administration? The Department of Commerce is renown for being a place where political favors are doled out. I wondered if you noticed this?

FLACK: I noted this, but it was nothing that affected me in any particular way. I don't even remember the name of the officials who changed. My immediate superiors for two levels upward were career civil service people and they did not change. So, it was not something that I really felt.

Q: You took the economics course.

FLACK: I took the advanced economics course at FSI which I think was six months. It was a strange course. I did all right, but not brilliantly in it. Most of the Foreign Service people are not good at math and that was the big problem. We all stumbled around in the math part of it to the despair of the teacher who was tearing his hair out. He would say, “How can you people be this dumb and be in the Foreign Service?” I remember also the exams. I think it was the first exam that we were given that everyone did very, very poorly. So, even though my college degree was in business and economics, it had changed and it was all new. And, this was the beginning of the use of the computer. We had a computer terminal which was a big deal, although by today's standards, very primitive.

Q: When you finished the course in 1970 whither?

FLACK: I was interested and did like commercial work and wanted to get a commercial job. As it turned out they offered me the position of commercial attach# in Abidjan which I took. We went in the summer of 1970 to the Ivory Coast.

Q: You were there from 1970 to when?

FLACK: From 1970 until the spring of 1971.

Q: Could you describe Abidjan when you got there?

FLACK: It was fascinating. We were not there long so I didn't get into it too much. It was a developing country but at a much more basic level. It was far less developed than Thailand and the Philippines. You had this pervasive French participation in the economy and tremendous French influence. It was almost a department of France. Independence was only eight years behind them. All of the major decision makers in the ministries were French and the Ivorians who were there were well educated in France and very nice people, but really on the margins of their policy making apparatus. They were not truly in charge of the central government.

Q: I have heard that in some of those countries in those days people would call up from one of the embassies and say, “Let me talk to the white.”

FLACK: Yes. One of the amusing things that I remember from that particular assignment was, you know the French have this system in their military of instead of doing military service you can become a “cooperant” and you are sent off to work on French aid missions and exchange programs, etc. These are young, well educated French people going out to work in various ministries. Well, this one French fellow had been referred to Ambassador Root because he had gone to Harvard and when he arrived he went to see him. Well, Root didn't quite know what to do with him so he called me in and pushed him off on me. Anyway, I got to know Francois very well. He was working as a cooperant in the ministry of finance. Basically he and one other cooperant were running the ministry of finance. They were the decision makers. These were two 24 year old Frenchmen right out of graduate school. This is an example of how influential they were and how they ran things. Incidentally, the cooperant is still a close friend and is a world-famous wine expert.

The economy was superficially rather sophisticated. When you came into Abidjan, they had a very nice airport, and the center of the downtown area had a few tall buildings, a luxury hotel, and a few good roads ran through. If you didn't leave the center of the city

you felt you were almost in San Francisco. But, you go one mile beyond that and you drop back two centuries. So there was this little island oasis of Abidjan which was very beautiful with some big buildings which looked nice in pictures. It looked like a very modern city. That was the only place in the Ivory Coast where there was any city at all. There were other towns which were basically overgrown villages and a little bit of economic activity here and there. But, the economy back then was agriculture, coffee and cocoa. They were trying to industrialize to a certain degree but they were smart in that they didn't follow the disastrous policies of some of their neighbors who as soon as they left the French had said they didn't want to be an agrarian society, we want to be an industrial society. Those countries more or less abandoned their agricultural roots and tried to build steel mills and things like this. The Ivorians, perhaps partially because they listened to the French, said they were an agricultural society and for the time being we want to build on that. In those years and in the years up to fairly recently, actually, the C#te d'Ivoire was doing very well economically because they stayed with their agricultural roots.

Q: What about the embassy? John Root was the ambassador?

FLACK: John Root was the ambassador and actually when I arrived we were in the process of closing down the old embassy and moving to a new building, which is the present embassy. We had been in a rather dilapidated apartment house and during the fall of 1970 we moved into this very nice new building. It was in the downtown area but in a small little street that had no name. The Ivorians asked us what kind of a name should they put on it. We thought and thought about it and finally decided that it should be Jessie Owens. Root was the ambassador the entire time that I was there. We had a number of relatively high level visits. The President of the EXIM bank came, for example. I took him around. There were some major projects. A big dam project that was going up. There was a major projects competition from major firms doing business there. And some small business development also.

Because the embassy was small, there was an economic officer and I was the commercial officer, we basically worked very closely together doing some of each other's work. I left early because my wife got ill.

Q: What about trying to be a commercial officer in a place essentially run by the French? The French have never been terribly forthcoming in these areas.

FLACK: I didn't feel that too much. They were so overwhelmingly in charge of things. I don't think they feared the competition. They knew we did very little and that it was probably normal that we should do a little more. So, therefore, my activities and any firms coming in, especially on the Ivorian side at a political level, were very much welcomed. They welcomed the idea of diversifying, if you like, in the investment area. They preferred to have more balance in their foreign investment rather than all French. So, where the French might have been a little uneasy with it, they didn't consider it to be a major threat and they knew also that politically the Ivorians wanted more American and other foreign investment to kind of balance the French a little bit.

Q: What sort of things were you concentrating on? I imaginagricultural machinery might be of interest.

FLACK: That's right, and a lot of heavy machinery for major projects. I mentioned the dam so Caterpillar and this type of thing was big. There were some projects from light industry. I remember one where a fellow was trying to establish a broom handle factory to make broom handles very cheaply to send back to the States. Well, you know the machinery for making broom handles is not exactly high technology. But, it was being brought in to set up a broom handle factory.

What was wonderful in doing this kind of work in the Ivory Coast was the travel up country. I went in some cases by small plane and sometime by car. As I said as soon as you leave Abidjan you go back a couple of centuries. There were little villages literally with these little

huts. There were the costumes and dancing which were really very picturesque and very interesting.

Q: Was their any concern of competition from the Soviet side?

FLACK: Yes, the Soviets were also trying to send in a lot of heavy equipment under their aid program. Now, we did have an ongoing AID program in the Ivory Coast and so did the Soviets. They were trying very hard to come into certain areas. They were pushing more heavy industry which the Ivorians were interested in, but establishing a steel mill was not one of their high priorities.

Now, I didn't mention that there is a lot of iron ore in the Ivory Coast. The development of the iron ore fields was another big major project. It was something that was just becoming of interest when I was there. An aside on that is the elephants running around the area where the iron ore has become red from the iron ore dust and when you see them from the air they look red, which is very strange. They are the famous “Red Elephants” of the Ivory Coast.

Q: Were there any trade problems that you had while you were there?

FLACK: I can't remember any specific trade problem. It was basically promotion. Well, there was one case where a young African American entrepreneur came in and was trying to set up a small factory. It became clear after working with him a little bit that he was not exactly a very forthright and reliable person. I think there were a few of those around, not only from the United States but from elsewhere who were out to make a fast buck under dubious circumstances.

Q: The Ivory Coast was considered the gem of the newly freecolonial countries. So, this must have attracted a lot of ...

FLACK: Yes, it did. Of course, the president, Houphouet-Boigny, who died a few years ago and was president for life for decades, was the most respected and prestigious African leader for many, many years. He unfortunately like many of these leaders, allowed power to go to his head. He built palaces and such. Nevertheless he was a very smart man. I remember in one meeting with him, a meeting with the president of the EXIM bank, the president of the bank was talking about a certain delay in various projects that they had put money up for and they were not going ahead as fast as they should. Houphouet looked at him and said, “You know, here in the Ivory Coast we want to go very, very rapidly and that is why we go so slowly,” which was kind of the wise man's thing, but it made a certain amount of sense. That was the Ivorian logic.

Q: During the time you were there, how heavy was the hand of thgovernment resting on the people?

FLACK: Well, that is hard to say. I can't say that it rested very heavily. The biggest building in town was the big agricultural bank and ministry all in one. From that point of view in agriculture the government was present everywhere in helping and managing the agricultural economy. For the rest of it, there was a plan, you know the French way of planning economic development, so in that sense I guess the hand of the government was there. But, I don't recall any feeling of oppression or any kind of political problem in that sense. Houphouet-Boigny was very much loved and respected and the system seemed to be working pretty well, even though it was a very autocratic system.

Q: Your wife became ill?

FLACK: Yes. When I had served in Athens a number of years before that, she had almost died from typhoid fever and they gave her a certain drug, chloram-phenicol, that reduced her white blood cell production in her bone marrow. We didn't know this until we were in the Ivory Coast where we were taking a malaria suppressant. The one we were taking was very, very strong and she couldn't tolerate it. What it did was affect her blood cell count

in her bone marrow. She became very, very ill and was evacuated to Spain. Actually she didn't feel well one day and went to see the doctor and never came home. She went from the doctor's office to the hospital to the KLM plane that took her to Madrid on a stretcher. It took them at least six weeks to determine what she had. She was told she couldn't take suppressants and if she ever got malaria she would die because she could not be treated. So, therefore, they said she could never go back and would never assign her to any malaria post after that. From then on I had a limited medical clearance as far as my wife was concerned. So, they had to move me out quickly. The State Department was going to do something for me but they weren't finding anything interesting for me, but the Department of Commerce said they needed a senior trade promotion officer at the U.S. trade center in Paris. I said “Yes” and we went up to Paris, where I was the senior of two trade promotion officers.

Q: You were there from when to when?

FLACK: From April, 1971 until August, 1974.

Q: ...particular briar patch of Paris.

FLACK: That is right. I was back here on consultation for quite a while because my wife was still not up to traveling. But, eventually we got over there. The trade center, which was part of the commercial operation of the embassy in Paris was in Neuilly out on Avenue Charles de Gaulle and was a very large modern building. It was a wonderful facility: well organized and thought out office space, etc. It was probably one of the nicest places I have ever worked in the Foreign Service. There was quite a large staff. We must have had about fifteen people altogether. There was a director, who was a Department of Commerce political appointee by the name of Scotty Borrowman. Then there was a deputy director, two trade promotion officers, myself and a fellow by the name of George Knowles, who is today the commercial counselor in Brussels, and a staff of secretaries, etc. We put on trade shows about once every two months. Basically my job was to do the promotion in

France. I would go out and talk to French industry about an upcoming show on materials testing equipment, for example. I would contact the potential users of this equipment and tell them about the coming trade show, give them brochures, etc. and invite them to come in to see the equipment. They were usually very interested in trade shows. Some of these U.S. companies were looking for agents so we would prepare lists of potential agents and actually visit potential agents so we could set up meetings.

Q: How would a list of agents be picked?

FLACK: Let's say it was materials testing equipment. First of all we would go to the commercial office at the embassy and look at trade lists of companies that import various types of equipment. With the trade list of companies dealing with specialized equipment we could go through making phone calls to make the first list and then by further investigation and visits with brochures showing the equipment in question we would ask if they would be interested in being an agent for the particular American firm. If they said they would like to talk with them, we would set up the appointment so that when the company arrived for the trade show they would have appointments not only with potential buyers of their equipment but with potential agents.

Q: How receptive were the French at that point?

FLACK: Very receptive. I did a lot of what we called blue ribbon calls which was getting to the highest level possible in a French company. I was a first secretary at the time and it was fairly easy to call and say the first secretary of the American embassy would like to call on the executive vice president for marketing, or whatever the title might be, and you get appointments with these people. I would introduce myself and tell them what I wanted and basically they were very receptive. I found very few that simply said they were not interested. If they did say they were not interested, they were always very polite about it. Most of them were interested. Business is a little different than politics.

Q: Was this the period of the American challenge?

FLACK: Yes, Pompidou was president, he died while we were there actually. It was still a pretty Gaullist environment. So, on a political level there were problems as there always are with the French. But, I wasn't really involved in that at all, except just peripherally. I was basically involved in this business element where the relationship was very good.

Q: How were American products looked upon in France?

FLACK: It depended on the area. We were trying to focus on high tech equipment at this trade center because that is where we had the competitive advantage in most cases. Every once and a while we would run into something that wasn't expected. I remember once going to see a laboratory that specialized in a certain type of equipment in France. I went in and said that we were having a show on this particular type of equipment and we think we have the best in the field. This guy was sitting behind a desk with a slight grin on his face. When I was finished he said, “You know, here in our company we consider the United States to be an underdeveloped country in this area.” Then he proceeded to show me his laboratories and it was true. They were far more advanced than anything we were doing. That was the exception, it was rare. But, we tended to assume that we were the best in everything and we weren't always.

Q: Were you using things of this nature as a feedback to somebody tsay, “Hey, maybe we need to do more in this field?”

FLACK: Well, not really. The decision on what type of shows we would have were made back in the Department of Commerce, partly, I would guess, on the success of shows that we were doing. For the most part these shows were successful. At the end of each show we would talk with each individual exhibitor and ask if they found an agent, made any sales, and what they felt their prospective sales through their new agent might be for the next year. We would add up the actual sales and the prospective sales of the show to

get a sales figure that you could use for the show because the Department of Commerce was always trying to quantify these thinghow much was made for the U.S. economy in these shows. The figures were always in the millions of dollars at the end of each show. In some cases, sales off the floor, actual orders, and in other cases from the agents who said they would so much business for you next year. So, these shows were successful and the areas then selected were based on what was selling, so to speak. It was basically all high tech computers, communications equipment, electronics, etc.

Q: Being in Paris, did you find that there was a difference between going out into the country elsewhere and Paris? Were there other worlds out there?

FLACK: Yes, but even today, Paris is still the centralized area of not only the administration but the economy as well. A lot is going on in the rest of France, it is being decentralized. When I was there the economy was highly centralized in Paris. Now, we did do promotion and contacts outside of Paris. That was done through our consulates, Marseille, Lyon, Bordeaux and Strasbourg, where we had commercial FSNs. They were the ones that would contact the local companies in their consular district that might be interested in a particular show.

Q: Were you reaching out to Luxembourg, Belgium and other places?

FLACK: Yes through our mailings because we always had a mailing list that the announcement of a show went out to. Very often there would be companies outside of France. However, there was another trade center in Frankfurt. We kind of divvied up Belgium, Switzerland, Luxembourg and to a certain degree a number of Italian and Spanish firms.

Q: I know that Paris is a place where congress often wants to put proteges. USIA often has a couple of cultural attach#s who are there because they either have strong support

from congress or for one reason or another. It is a nice place to send people. Did you feel this at all at the trade center?

FLACK: No. Of course, the ambassadors were all political, there were three during the time I was there. The rest of the embassy including the commercial counselors were career people. So, I didn't see that too much there.

Q: How close did you feel to the embassy?

FLACK: Pretty close. As close as you can in an embassy the size of Paris. It is a huge embassy and we were physically detached. I would go occasionally to staff meetings in the embassy, but not all that often. We had lots of friends at the embassy. Also, we lived at this little compound of apartments in Neuilly, two apartment buildings owned by the embassy. American officers and personnel lived there. So, of course, we were very much part of the embassy community because we knew everybody there. But, in terms of being close on a professional level, a work level, no, not very close.

Q: Were there any political developments during this time that mighhave intruded on what you were doing?

FLACK: No. It was the Pompidou era and he died towards the end of the time I was there. Then Giscard became president. We had fairly good relations at that time. There was the usual Franco-American friction along the way, but frankly, I had lots of friends in France from my previous days there and my wife being French born we had family there as well. We did a lot of private traveling. I didn't do much professional traveling in France. I found the climate to be one of a pretty good economy, and I can't say I felt any strong anti-Americanism.

Q: On the trade promotion side, what was the feeling between thbudding European economic union that was coming along at that time?

FLACK: From our point of view, it was almost non existent. The economic community was beginning but was not something that was looming large. The French economy was still French planning, not planning from Brussels. Europe was still pretty much a thing of the future that was building. The Treaty of Rome was signed and commitments were being made. The French had previously opposed the British coming into the EC and this was the time that it was beginning to change. I think they came in under Giscard.

Q: Who were our competitors for selling products to the French?

FLACK: I would say basically other European countries, Germany, Switzerland, UK, to some extent Italy. The Japanese were just starting to get into the European market at that point. For example, at that point Japanese cars in France were almost non-existent. The French market was and still is rather highly protected and you just didn't see a lot of Japanese or other non-European things.

Q: You left there in 1974.

FLACK: We left in 1974 and I was assigned to Algiers. They figured that I had had three years in Paris and they were looking for a commercial attach# in Algiers. I went with some reluctance there. First of all I was a little bit uneasy about my wife's health. It is not a malaria post but she was also to have excellent medical treatment close by and, of course, we didn't there. The answer was that we would be only two hours away from the American hospital in Paris, which was true. Anyway, we went to Algiers in 1974 after home leave arriving in late summer.

Q: You were in Algiers from?

FLACK: From 1974 to 1976, two years. It was a really fascinating time. First of all we didn't have an embassy when I first arrived. It was the American Interest Section of the Swiss embassy. So, even though we were physically located in what at one time had been the American embassy, we flew the Swiss flag, had Swiss ID cards, stationery, etc. We were

all officially Swiss, even though on operational levels we operated as Americans under Swiss protection. There was an enormous amount of American investment and business in Algeria in natural gas and oil. The economy was doing well, and still is, strangely enough, its booming. The Algerian economy now is growing fast in spite of the slaughter that is taking place there.

We had Bechtel doing a major project in building a natural gas plant at Arzew. There was Morrison Knunson doing a major irrigation project. Major U.S. firms doing major projects in the country. So there was a lot of work to be done and it was very gratifying because you would work with U.S. businesses and the government and a huge project would flower out of it.

We, also, of course, during that period in 1975 reestablished diplomatic relations which had been broken in 1967 with the first war in the Middle East. Kissinger came on a visit just before I had arrived and came back a year later, after I had been there for a year, and met with Boumedienne and I actually went with him for the meeting. That was a story worth telling because Boumedienne was a dictator and not very well liked. He hadn't been seen for months and there had been rumors that someone had tried to kill him, but nobody knew anything. On the other hand, Kissinger was coming and they said Boumedienne would meet with Kissinger.

It was a dark and stormy night when Kissinger's plane came into the Algiers airport. To step back a moment, on his first trip, one of his secret service agents and one of the Algerian agents had gotten into a fist fight at the airport over who wold stand next to him. When Kissinger was coming down the ram to get off the plane there was the secret service and the Algerian agent both vying for who would be at the bottom of the stairs and they got into a physical fight. Kissinger is walking down the ramp and here are these two guys battling at the bottom of the ramp. So, this time we had an arrangement where the same two guys would shake hands and stand at the bottom of the ramp when Kissinger came down. That worked.

Kissinger often traveled with his own armored Cadillac on a separate plane. They wouldn't let the Cadillac off the plane. This was going to be a overnight stay with the meeting that evening. They had a bunch of old Citroens lined up there. At this point we didn't have diplomatic relations and couldn't force anything, so we left the Cadillac in the plane and got in a Citroen and took off in the middle of the night. We were going to go directly to the meeting. Algiers' nights can be really, really dark. I don't know why that is. I remember sitting in the back seat of this Citroen, Kissinger was in the car behind me, with some Algerian agents who had all the windows down and were leaning out looking backward at the car with Kissinger.

So, we raced through the city. No one ever knew where Boumedienne was. We ended up in front of some rather modest little villa in the far reaches of upper Algiers. Boumedienne was a very striking looking individual. First of all he had very large, intense eyes. There was almost a hypnotic look to him. We walked in and he was wearing a black burnous (cape), so he looked like a monk. Previously we had seen him with normal length hair. His hair was almost all gone. There was just a little black hair growing and his head looked like it had been shaved. So, he really did look like a monk. We realized something must have happened. He must have had an operation because they wouldn't have shaved his head like that. We later learned that he had suffered a head wound in an assassination attempt.

We sat down and began negotiations about a number of things but most importantly, the reestablishment of diplomatic relations. I remember one of the things that we were discussing as a side issue was the establishment of a bilateral economic commission similar to what we had with Egypt. The Algerians didn't like the idea very much. We had been talking to them about some of these things for quite some time. Kissinger was suppose to establish this commission. We started off talking about the reestablishment of diplomatic relations and then a little about establishing this bilateral commission that would follow, Kissinger thinking that would be a carrot for them. Although it must have been in his briefing papers he seems to be rather surprised that they weren't interested. Without

a second thought, without consulting anybody, Kissinger simply said, “Forget about the commission, let's get down to business about reestablishing relations.” So he gave up on an important U.S. initiative as a negotiation ploy, which was a very smart move. We almost agreed to reestablishment of relations, but there was the question of timing and it was put off for two or three months. Anyway, he left with more or less the agreement of reestablishing relations. The head of the Interest Section was Dick Parker, who was later ambassador to Morocco and Lebanon. He became ambassador after we reestablished relations.

Q: On the commercial side, basically we are talking about major bits of oil and gas equipment. I thought one just went to Houston to buy equipment for that.

FLACK: That is true to a certain degree. Obviously these big companies didn't need the Interest Section's help in making contacts. When Bechtel came to town they pretty much took care of themselves. But, there were many times when they needed help and would call and say, “You know this has gone wrong and do you know somebody in the ministry of whatever that can help us with this?” So, we did work with them. I went out to Arzew on many occasions to visit the project and see the work. They built a small American town out there. A small subdivision of very nice little houses that were by the coast and the project they were building. Later, Ambassador Parker paid a couple of visits to these projects where they would really put on a good show for him.

Q: How did you find working with the Algerian ministries? Algerianare sort of a dower group, I'm told.

FLACK: They are. They are what we used to call a “serious people.” We had excellent relations with the Algerians; at least I did. They were difficult because they were very defensive about their relationship with the U.S. They were afraid of being seen with Americans. They were afraid of being identified as having too much contact with Americans. But, on an official level when I had to go my meetings... for example, one of

the things I did there aside from commercial work, I did civil aviation work and FAA had a lot to do with the local FAA equivalent, the acronym was ENEMA [sic]. So, I had a lot to do with ENEMA in arranging visits with FAA, and these people were just wonderful, all the time. At the time the professional and working level relationships with the government and the ministries, at least for me, were excellent, and I am sure with the others as well. I know with the economic officer they were good. I know Parker had excellent relationships.

However, on a social level, if you wanted to invite them to a party, especially if it was someone from the foreign ministry, there was one couple that was kind of the designated American embassy social contact that always came. None of the others did. We would invite three or four Algerian couples and it was always the same couple that could come. The others would regret. So, we knew there was a policy of just having a certain person being the contact for the Americans and the others weren't allowed to go.On a personal level we had made friends with a number of Algerians who were afraid to come to our house for fear of being identified as being friends of the Americans. When we left Algeria, one couple we knew quite well didn't come to our farewell party and we were hurt. We were very surprised that they didn't come. When we were at the airport getting ready to leave, a fellow came with a package for us from this couple. It was a beautiful Algerian miniature with a little note saying, “We could not be seen at your party, but we are going to miss you very much.” And, this happened very often, not only with me but with others. They were reluctant for political reasons to become too much seen with Americans.

Q: What were the politics of the country that brought forth this?

FLACK: At the time I was there Boumedienne was the head of a socialist Islamic dictatorship and it wasn't working. You had basically a socialist, almost communist, regime, everything was run by the state and nothing worked. The French had left a city of about 400,000 people in 1962 and the economy was basically agricultural. The upper coast of Algeria is like the coast of California, wonderful agricultural land. That was totally abandoned. So, by the time we were there which was a good ten, twelve years after

independence, the economy had broken down completely. There were food shortages at all times. Not only food shortages, but shortages of whatever you were looking for at the moment. If you needed a battery for your flashlight you wouldn't find one. You would find flashlights but no batteries. This was basically because the decisions on buying and selling were being made by bureaucrats behind desks who had no idea about business or the law of supply and demand.

I remember a businessman coming to me in my office one day. I had seen him the day before. He was selling these very large lighting elements for street lights, the part the light bulb goes in. He had figured out what they needed and was going to the ministry. He came back the next day and said, “I am absolutely amazed.” I said, “What is the matter?” He said, “I made an incredible sale but they bought four times as many as they need. They are going to go bad before they can use them all. I don't know if I should tell them or make the sale.” I think he probably made the sale. People were doing this all the time, they just didn't know what they needed and how many they needed. If somebody was going to be buying the state's supply of transistor radios they would just pull a figure out of the air. Most of them would then be put into storage. Nobody needed them. Dumb things like this. They didn't let the market work.

Q: What about influences from the Soviet Union?

FLACK: It was very high. The Soviet Union, China and North Korea. Their embassies were very active there. Kim Il Sung came to visit while I was there. He stayed for two months. We thought he would never leave and couldn't understand why he stayed so long. Practically everybody in town got a set of complete works of Kim. They must have come with a plane load of them. At the airport you constantly saw the Soviet air force planes. The military was basically supplied by the Soviets. So, there were very close relationships with the Soviet Bloc. Lots of East Bloc countries had aid programs in Algeria. The Bulgarians, for example, sent a lot of doctors.

Q: Was there any feeling that this relationship was beginning tbreak down?

FLACK: Only in the sense that the economy was going so badly that you would have thought some intelligent people there would start thinking about what is really going on here, socialism is not working in this country. But, I didn't really see much of that. The Soviets for example were building a huge steel mill. One of the things that I did when I was therTimes Magazine used to do what they called a “Times News Tour.” They would gather 20 or 30 top executives and send them off on a tour by chartered plane. They came to Algeria. I was making arrangements with the Algerian government to show them various things. They were very anxious to show them all these wonderful things that the Soviets had done for them. One of the things was a steel mill outside of Algiers. We arranged a visit to the steel mill which we knew was not working. I was surprised when the Algerians wanted to show the mill to them.

Well, we went over with this group and I remember we were walking through it and I was surprised that there was activity. There were people running around. It looked like it was probably staged, but nevertheless there was activity. I was walking with Lee Iacocca and he was looking and chuckling to himself. He said, “Who do these people think they are trying to fool?” I said, “Is this as I suspect all put on?” He said, “I don't know who they think we are, we are industrialists, businessmen. We know how a steel mill operates. See that machine over there? (It was a big machine with a huge roll of steel, like a stamping machine.) If they press the start button on that it is going to snap because they have it threaded backwards. If you look through the plant you can see that this is just not a plant, it is a movie set. The Algerians must think we are real fools.” Well, you wonder about things like that. How could they make such stupid mistakes and think they were getting away with it? I don't know.

Q: Did you find the hand of the French there at all?

FLACK: There was much French influence, of course, because there is a strong tie with France even though it is a love/hate relationship. There were three countries with major problems with Algeria — France, Morocco and the United States. Morocco because of the border war over the Western Sahara, which was starting when we were there. So, we used to say the United States was number three on the Algerian hate list, the Moroccans first, the French second and the American third. The French had a terrible time there because their cars were spit upon, their houses were broken into regularly. For an Algerian it is hard to tell an American from a Frenchman so we were often though to be French and were given a bad time. It was hard, especially for the French. On the other hand, they are still the biggest trading partner and there is a terrific connection there. There are so many Algerians in France who are sending money back. Even back then there was an enormous amount of money coming in from France. So, there was a lot going on in that relationship, but it was also a very bitter one because of the war.

Q: Were you able to have political discussions with the Algerianabout Israel, etc.?

FLACK: Yes, but it was very, very difficult because it was clear that they were very uncomfortable talking about it. They were afraid of it somehow getting back to the people above them or on their own political level that they had been talking to the Americans and they really weren't supposed to. So, anytime you got into a political discussion it was usually with a non official. Our best friends there, he was an art professor at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. He was a painter and his wife was French and they had two kids. We got to know them fairly well. He would discuss with me these things but it was because he was an academic. He was very Algerian and very pro- Algerian, but he was perhaps a little bit more objective on these things and I could have good discussions with him.

Q: Was the rise of fundamentalism apparent at that point?

FLACK: It was coming. There was certainly a lot of things going on in the society which indicated that the Islamists were gaining ground. In terms of fundamentalist, I would say

no, it wasn't too clear at that point. It was all on the basis of what the Algerian government was doing to Arabize the society. For example, the language. They were taking French out of the schools and making Arabic the official language, which is normal but it was really dumb to stop teaching French to young people. When I was there, if you were talking to anybody that was under 15, they didn't speak French at all because it was no longer taught in the schools. If they were over 15 they spoke French and the older the person you talked to the more fluent their French was. It seems to me to be only logical to interface with the rest of the world; they should have kept teaching French. Instead their nationalism was trying to repress it.

Q: Were there any other developments you would like to mention?

FLACK: Let's see. I still remember the moment when official announcement of the reestablishment of relations came over the news archives. Parker called us all into the center part of the embassy and was reading the announcement, we knew it was coming but the locals didn't, and there was a great deal of cheering by the national employees. I will never forget this. This guy who worked for me and had been there before when we had had relations, ran off. I asked him where he was going and he said that he would be back in a minute. He went back into the GSO's back closet and was rummaging around. He came back out with the metal U.S. embassy seal and said, “Come with me.” We all went out to the front gate and took down the Swiss seal and put back the American seal. That was fun because it gave you an idea of the feelings that these people had at that point. I was really amazed at that.

Q: Then you left in 1976 and whither?

FLACK: We went back to Athens. I had been wanting to go back for some time. The commercial attach#'s job was becoming available and I wanted that job. Dick Jackson was the assistant commercial attach# and he wanted to move up to become commercial counselor, but he only had one more year to go. Finally what I agreed to was that I would

take his job as assistant until he left the following year. So, I was actually sent there as an assistant and did take over the counselor's job when he left.

Q: You were there then from 1976 until 1980. What was the situatioin Greece at that time?

FLACK: As you recall I had been there earlier in 1963-65 when Karamanlis was prime minister. I missed the bad years, the junta. When I came in 1976, Karamanlis was again prime minister. I felt very strongly about this aura of junta years that was hanging over the country but I had not experienced the dictatorship personally and here I was back just as if nothing had changed in between. But, obviously things had changed and there were a lot of bitterness about the junta and those bad years. I found the climate to be considerably more anti-American than it had been previously. We were basically blamed for the junta. You had the rising socialist PASOK movement at that point, which was very anti-American, although the government was still Karamanlis and was basically working with us in most areas.

Q: What was the PASOK?

FLACK: It was the Papandreou Socialist Party.

Q: A leftist nationalistic party?

FLACK: Yes, that is right. They were making all sorts of noise on the left and were becoming more and more powerful and disruptive. There were a lot of demonstration when we were there during those years on the various anniversaries of some student that was killed, etc. During the time that I was there, there was not any assassinations of U.S. officials, but just before I arrived there had been.

Q: The station chief was killed in 1974, I believe. And then therwas another assassination of a navy captain.

FLACK: Exactly. So, while I was there, there was a great deal of security and a great deal of concern especially on the part of the agency people. I remember the station chief being extremely concerned about her safety. We were all told to be very careful and the security office was very active. That was the time also of package and letter bombs. I can remember one that was received by the embassy and having the Marines set it in the back parking lot to blow it up. They didn't realize how powerful it was and one of them got injured because he was too close. So, it was a time when there was a lot of anti American political activity. We had to put up with quite a bit then.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

FLACK: When I first arrived it was Jack Kubisch and Hawk Mills was just coming in as DCM, who I had known before when I was in Athens. And then Bob McCloskey came in towards the end of my period.

Q: Was Kubisch involved in commercial affairs?

FLACK: Very little. Neither was McCloskey, although McCloskey at one point upon receiving one of those letters that I referred to earlier from the Secretary saying he was the chief commercial officer in the embassy, sent it to me with an attached note saying he had just taken my job. Neither of them were particularly active or interested except in a general way. They knew it was important and interested in it but they had far more pressing political problems with all that was going on with Cyprus, NATO, Greece, our bases, etc.

Q: Before we turn to the commercial side, what about Cyprus? There had been a coup in Cyprus where the Greeks tried to take over Cyprus in July, 1974. The Turks responded by an invasion and Cyprus of divided, where it remains today. Was this something that was brought up quite often?

FLACK: Constantly. The Greeks blamed the United States, and I must say in my view I agree with them, for the situation in Cyprus then and today, of the divided island. I agree with them in the following way. Had we wanted to stop the Turks we could have. Kissinger once said, when confronted by the question of why didn't he use American military force to stop that invasion - you remember the timing of this, it was in the summer of 1974 - “I was very busy in Washington. We were undergoing the worse constitutional crisis in our history.” It was almost like saying, “I had my mind on other things.” Joe Sisco, the under secretary for political affairs, was the guy who was making these decisions and I know Joe pretty well and he is kind of defensive about this. Obviously, if he had been able to have the Secretary's and the President's full attention on this, they could have stopped it, but they didn't. The result was the Turkish invasion and the division of the island and the country.

Q: We had stopped a similar Turkish invasion before. In all respecI think one has to point out that the Greeks brought this on themselves.

FLACK: I would agree with that, but only partly.

Q: We were once more supposed to pull their chestnuts out of thfire.

FLACK: I think if we had taken a longer term view of the potential problems resulting from this invasion, we would have seen that we should have stopped it and I think we could have at the time. Whatever the merits on each side of the case, the Greeks obviously had that ax to grind and I don't think I ever had a conversation with any Greek on political affairs where they didn't bring this up saying, “You are fully responsible for the ruin of Cyprus. It is your fault.” And then, Americans usually, as you just did, take one step back and say, “Yes, but you were responsible for the problem in the first place.” At that point they would argue that as well.

Q: Well, I don't know. I found after my four years in Greece I was a little tired of everything that happened.

FLACK: Yes, everything that went wrong in Greece the Greeks blamed America for and they always assumed that we had unlimited power in terms of running things. If something went wrong internally in Greece it was our fault. It was CIA's fault because the CIA is really running the country. Of course, that was not really true. That is sort of a generic problem I have seen around the world. Most of the countries we deal with think we can control more than we can.

Q: I think so too, particularly when you move into the smaller countries and the more Middle East ones, which I consider Greece to be. We had base negotiations going on. Kubisch was very much involved with those. It looked like there was a chance we might not have them. This was NATO bases too. Did you find a feeling among your Greek contacts that American should just get out?

FLACK: No, I don't think so. Most of the people I knew were critical of the UniteStates in many ways but they also recognized that without the United States presence there they would be in real trouble, especially with Turkey.

Q: The alternative, of course, was if we had to abandon our bases iGreece, we would have moved our bases to Turkey.

FLACK: Yes, and, of course, that is why we have gotten into this relationship over the years where we have had to balance our relationship with Greece and Turkey with this ratio of seven to ten in terms of military assistance, etc. We have had to do this in order to keep the Greeks in line.

Q: Turning to the commercial side, what was your main emphasis?

FLACK: Well, again, a wide range of the traditional commercial activities. Everything from trade investment promotion to the local trade reports on local business and making the contacts in the business community and the government. I must say I always believed that commercial officers abroad have the potential for having the most complete set of contacts in any given country because we work with government, the private sector and the American business community. The political officers and military officers have their own special areas and don't have this interface with the business community that the commercial officers do. We get a very different view sometimes of what is going on and how people feel. In the case of Greece the business community was conservative and pro-American, far more than the foreign ministry which was center, center-left and much less pro-American. So, I think the commercial officers get a slightly more balanced view of where a country stands than political officers.

Q: There is a large Greek American community in the United States which packs a lot of power politically. Much of this community is in the professions and business. Did you find Greek American interest of concern about commerce in Greece.

FLACK: Very much so. There was a lot of Greek American businessmen who were doing business with Greece and came to Greece regularly. Some of them lived in Greece and had dual nationality. It was not unusual for us to take a call from an American businessman who was coming to Greece and discover he had a Greek name. It was a great advantage for a businessman to come in and be accepted like that because they were really considered to be Greek Americans, and not American Greeks.

Q: What were American commercial opportunities in Greece?

FLACK: Back then it was really across the board. The economy was doing pretty well. The main concern was the entrance or hopeful entrance of Greece into the EC. It was more or less decided upon while I was there and the time tables were set. But, there was a great deal of wondering if this was really the right thing and was it truly possible. I had a Peugeot

and people in the gas station would say that it was a real nice car and “when we are in the Common Market I will be able to buy one of these,” meaning that prices will be cheaper because they were more expensive in Greece than they were in France. There were a lot of these misunderstandings that somehow their membership in the Common Market was going to solve all their problems and life would become easy. There was a lot of this unhealthy thinking. So, we did a lot of work trying to look at the Greek market and how it would change as it went into the EC in terms of opportunities for U.S. firms.

Q: How did it look?

FLACK: It looked pretty good. It looked better than it turned out to be in retrospect, as I look at it now. I think I had a little bit of localitist while I was there, I spoke Greek, had lots of Greek friends and began to think of Greece as the potential California of Europe. The place had really, really exploded and become a wonderful market. Actually I still believe that is possible, if there were enormous changes in the country, which probably are not possible. But, there is a terrific potential. They have a lot of things going for them, except maybe the entrenched and corrupt bureaucracy.

Q: To me, one of the remarkable things when I ran the consular section would be to see essentially peasants coming in and getting visas. These people seemed to be the most unpromising material just looking at them, and then seeing what their cousins and others have done in the United States in a very short time. One always thinks of the Greek countryside where the men sit around in cafes drinking coffee while their wives are out tilling the fields, and yet when they hit the United States they hit it running. So, there is something buried in the Greek that doesn't seem to come out much in Greece.

FLACK: Another example of that. I remember we had a rich Greek American who was donating a very expensive piece of medical equipment to one of the hospitals and he came to talk to me about it. He was said, “I'm a Greek American, I was born in the United States, but I feel strongly about Greece and want to help these people, but I am wondering

why wealthy Greeks are not doing what I am doing." I couldn't answer other than it is just not done. A wealthy Greek does not give an expensive piece of equipment as a charity thing to a local hospital. He thinks that is the government's job. That is why he pays taxes. So, there is something different about the American mentality and when they get over here they think differently and it showed right there.

Q: There really doesn't seem to be much of a public service efforthere.

FLACK: No, as there is in many European countries, I must say, where there is a tradition in the last fifty years or a very strong semi-socialist, if not socialist state, these people all say that is why they pay taxes. I don't need to help the poor, that is what I pay taxes for.

Q: How about the bureaucracy as far as getting things in and peopldoing business?

FLACK: I don't think I have ever worked where from a business point of view it is more difficult. There you did have to get into paying people off. I never did, but I know businessmen who did it on a regular basis. If you want something to move through the port you go down with a lot of cash and pay the right people and it will get through. Everything is just a question of money. A friend of mine who was a Greek American who inherited a very nice apartment was trying to pay off the taxes on it and they had levied an enormous tax on it which he said was totally unfair. He said his lawyer and the head of the tax office actually came to see him and laid it out on the table explaining what he had to do. He could pay them this much and they will lower it or they will have to pay the full amount. He gasped and said that it was illegal. They said that was the way they did it there. In the end he paid less then the stated taxes but it was a payoff to the lawyer and tax man. I would say, "Well, the press will pick up on something like this." He said, "No, because they know that is the way things are done."

Q: I have never seen so much illegal house building and poor management even when I was there under the colonels. I thought at least they could do something, but no.

FLACK: They don't see a lot of this type of activity and behavior as being corrupt. They think that is the way it has always been done and therefore we are going to continue doing so. It is an enormous problem in Europe. As we all know, Greece right now is the least economically stable member of the Economic Union and is out of the question to belong to the monetary union. It is basically because of this system. They have been unable to reform it and make it a modern, functioning bureaucracy that is not corrupt in our sense.

Q: Were there any events that you would like to talk about thaoccurred during your tour in Greece?

FLACK: I had a lot of visits from U.S. state trade people. This was during a time when a lot of American states individually developed their own trade promotion offices for export, so we would have the governor of Florida coming with a trade mission of Florida's biggest firms. And, of course there were congressional visits, the CODELs.

Q: Well, Greek money was next to importance to Jewish money at thastage and probably more deeply spread about the States.

FLACK: I must say the CODELs that I was involved in there were very helpful in a sense. The Greeks loved CODELs because they loved to butter them up. They would always start out the opening remarks with, “We are so thankful of what the United States did for us after World War II, USAID, etc.” They would go through this long litany of wonderful things to make the congressmen feel real good about being there. Then they would get down to the issues at hand which very often were things that we didn't agree on but the congressmen would feel less inclined to be contentious about it because they had just been buttered up.

Q: How effective did you find the state delegations?

FLACK: Pretty good. They varied of course. I remember ones from Florida, Illinois and New York that were very good. Some of the state operations are very effective in

organizing their companies that are interested in exports or doing more exports if already exporting and to promote the state through their own offices. In some cases there were cities or port authorities that had their own exporting promotion offices.

Q: You arrived there and the Carter Administration came in shortly after you arrived. Did you find change of emphasis at all on your kind of work?

FLACK: Well, yes, I think, because the out going administration had been the Republican administration that the Greeks blamed Cyprus for, there was a hope that this would be a breath of fresh air. That American policies would be more friendly to Greece and less friendly to Turkey. I think there was a feeling of an ending of a certain period and the turning of a page and that maybe after this things would get better. I am not so sure that they did, but this was a time when there was a hope that there would be better relations.

Q: Was this a period when the troubles in Lebanon were beginning tshift American business centralized offices to Athens?

FLACK: Yes. One of the big things that we were working on was the arrival of regional offices of U.S. firms from Lebanon to Athens. The Greeks played this up very well. They recognized what was happening and they did their best to facilitate these new firms coming in that had regional offices handling Middle Eastern business. Beirut was going down the drain and Athens was rising. I must say they didn't do a good enough job of it. They could have been really a regional center. Although they did a considerable amount of facilitating for these people, they didn't do enough. Again it was a question of the entrenched and inefficient and corrupt bureaucracy that eventually slowed things down. Other firms were going to Rome, Cairo, Paris and Brussels. The logical place, it seemed to me at the time, was Athens because of its location, but their communications were not quite up to speed and the bureaucratic hassles were considerable. But, they were trying very hard then and a lot of firms did establish regional offices.

Q: Did the taking in of our embassy in Tehran and the hostagsituation in Iran have any affect on our operations in Athens?

FLACK: Not directly on operations, but it certainly was a time when it was difficult for everybody in the Foreign Service. I remember it as a very trying time, but I don't recall that it had any specific affect on our relations. Everybody was sympathetic, all of our diplomatic colleagues, of course, and the Greeks, but there was nothing specifically that affected our situation, except in Greek security.

Q: Did you, yourself, feel any problem with terrorism in Athens?

FLACK: I never personally had any problems but we certainly felt it in the sense that we were constantly being given guidelines to bring home and make sure that nobody accepted packages and you checked your car in the morning to make sure there wasn't a bomb in it and you varied your route to work, the usual things. We were simply more careful than we had been before. Luckily during the period that I was there we did not have any major incidents.

Q: You left Athens in 1980, where did you go?

FLACK: Back here to Washington, to the National Defense University and then on to an assignment to work for the Under Secretary for Management on a very special project.

Q: Okay, let's close and pick up at this point next time.

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Q: Today is the 19th of February, 1998. Ron, you wanted to go baca bit.

FLACK: Yes, I wanted to mention something about my tour in Athens and the changeover during that period from the Foreign Service to the Foreign Commercial Service of the commercial activities. This happened during my time in Athens and I was commercial

counselor there. As you may remember there was a great deal of pressure on congress during the seventies for the Foreign Service to either improve greatly its service to the American business community or hand it over to the Department of Commerce and create a new agency to handle foreign commercial affairs. In the end, of course, the Department of Commerce did establish the Foreign Commercial Service around 1979 or 1980. I was a mid-grade Foreign Service officer at that point and I remember considering whether or not I should go with the Foreign Commercial Service. I was going to seriously consider it because a lot of my experience in the Foreign Service had been commercial, I enjoyed the work, thought it was important and thought I could really do some interesting and good work for the Foreign Commercial Service.

Strangely enough, they in my view, mishandled badly the changeover and the establishment of their new foreign commercial service and I decided not to join it. I was an O-1 at the time, not in the senior service at that point, but in terms of foreign commercial officers, that was a pretty senior officer. I very definitely got the feeling that they didn't want the more senior Foreign Service commercial officers because they wanted to bring in their own political type people and people from the Department of Commerce to take the best jobs. So, in fact, I wasn't ever really formally asked if I wanted to join the Foreign Commercial Service. I suppose I could have gone ahead and asked to join and maybe I could have, but I got the feeling that they were very cool to Foreign Service officers that were considering going over to the Foreign Commercial Service. I thought, also, that the people at the head in the Department of Commerce who were handling this were doing it rather badly. They were causing a lot of friction with the State Department and the Foreign Service which I thought was unnecessary.

I just wanted to mention that in stepping back and reflecting a bit on those years in Athens. I do remember the last year being preoccupied a little bit by my own future, whether I would stay in commercial work and go into the Foreign Commercial Service or stay in the Foreign Service and go on to other economic work, which in the end I did.

Q: You then went to the National Defense University?

FLACK: That's right.

Q: From when to when?

FLACK: It was ICAF, the Industrial College of the Armed Forces athe National Defense University. That was in 1980 to 1981.

Q: What was your impression of ICAF?

FLACK: Well, it was as everybody seems to feel, a good year, but it was not an exceptional year. Because I was in the economic side of the training, the Industrial College, I felt frankly that the assignments that personnel were giving out at that time were reversed. In other words, they were sending political officers to the War College and economic officers to the Industrial College with the idea that this would broaden their views so when they went into the senior service they would have a better understanding of total relations, and it should have been the other way around. They should have been sending the political officers to the Industrial College and the economic officers to the War College to balance their views. So, I felt a third to a half of the courses that I had were marginal to worthless as far as I was concerned because I had had it all before. These were things that I knew and knew well. I must say that most of the class were military officers with just a few Foreign Service people there. But, nevertheless, it seemed to me that it was a lot of overkill on the economic side and I kept on trying to get over and attend some of the classes on the War College side because that was where I needed to have more expertise. But, it was a good year, I enjoyed it.

Q: I went to senior seminar and didn't go to War College, but don't you think that the War College per se is where the future commanders go more than ICAF? Is there is a different type of person at each college?

FLACK: I really don't know. I don't know about the promotion patterns of the military following that, but I don't think so. I think ICAF in the military is highly respected. It is a little bit like in the Foreign Service where you have the economic and the political. You can't really say any more that economic officers are less successful in their careers than political officers.

Q: I was just thinking that for some reason the War College is perceived where our political officers were going to be dealing with political/military things and would run across their counterparts more than in ICAF.

FLACK: Yes, that is true.

Q: Did the foreign affairs side come up much?

FLACK: It did come up and I was surprised and pleased that I was given so much deference, if you like, from my fellow students because most of them were military. They often asked me what I though and took my opinions very seriously and kind of considered me to be sort of the wise man in the group, which I really wasn't. But, I was pleased that I had this feeling that these people had great respect for Foreign Service officers.

Q: Yes, I think there is this thing that we don't realize how much we pick up that is sort of extraordinary about dealing in foreign affairs. We sort of do it and think everybody thinks the same way and we always associate with each other so we don't give much credence to the credentials of someone else because we know it better than they do within our own ranks.

FLACK: That is true. The bare basics of diplomacy and international relations that we take for granted many people don't have that kind of an understanding and I guess we shouldn't take it for granted. I noticed very much yesterday in that town meeting in Colombus...

Q: We are talking about pending hostilities with Iraq in 1998.

FLACK: That's right and Madeleine Albright was answering a very hostile question from a young student who was pressing her on why does the United States want to bomb Iraq when there are other countries equally as bad around the world that we don't want to bomb and are not putting pressure on. The answer to that, as she pointed out, was, “Give me 50 minutes with you and I will give you a little lesson on international relations and in particular American foreign policy. It is not a question you can answer in two or three minutes.” So, she didn't really answer the question he was pressing her to answer, but she couldn't under those circumstances, it was impossible. Having just finished teaching for two years at New York University, I have been in that situation, too. But, there I had the luxury of having a full hour or two to answer such questions in detail.

Q: What was your impression of our military?

FLACK: I was frankly very impressed. I was impressed by the quality of these men and women. They were really bright, knew their particular specialities very well and were really a good group to be working with. I think also as I mentioned I was pleased to be included in this group, as a special member, and they paid a certain deference to me.

Q: You left there in 1981 and went where?

FLACK: I was assigned to the Department in the Management areworking for the under secretary for Management.

Q: Who was the under secretary?

FLACK: Richard Kennedy. I worked for Ambassador Bob Miller. who had just returned from being ambassador to Malaysia, in what they called M/MO Management Operations. It was kind of an office which was supposed to be working on analytical issues of how you relate the resources of the Department to its policy priorities. In big overall terms this was

what we were supposed to be doing. However, I kind of fell into an area that became of great interest to me and I have a good story to tell.

At that time, 1981, the Reagan Administration was settling into the White House and one of the things that they noted was that there was virtually no plan for the continuity of government and the succession of the presidency in the case of nuclear attack or death of the President or the death of one or more of the President's successors. There were plans that were decades old that didn't work, that everybody knew about and were basically a joke. The system was actually designed in Harry Truman's days. So, people in the White House decided there should be an immediate and serious program started to provide for a program of continuity of government in the case of nuclear attack. In other words, if the President and one or more of his successors are killed in a nuclear attack to provide for a successor president and to make sure that he or she had connectivity to all of the major elements of the government to carry on under nuclear war. So, your major agencies in this were the White House, Department of State, Department of Defense and the CIA and FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency). FEMA was kind of the administrator of this program as it was started, but the substantive agencies were the Departments of State and Defense, CIA and NSA.

This issue had come up in M/MO that we were supposed to be looking at emergency plans and nobody was taking it seriously in the Department. It was sloughed off in M and nobody was looking at it. I started looking at it and realized that the CIA was off and running with this. They had established a major working group, a lot of resources, and were working very seriously, as was the White House and the Department of Defense. The State Department was literally left in the dust. Nobody was doing it. So, I started picking up on it and going to some of these meetings and letting people know in the Department that I was doing this and telling them of the importance of what was going on. Basically what we were designing was an interim government that would operate during and after a major nuclear exchange. The way it was headed, foreign relations would have been handled by the CIA because the State Department didn't care about this issue. So, I was desperately

trying to get the attention of high level officials in the State Department to do something about this, explaining that if something happens the State Department won't exist any more and the CIA will be running everything.

I wrote a memo to Kennedy at the time, through Bob Miller, and got his attention. He was a military man and I think understood what was going on.

Q: He was very close to Alexander Haig.

FLACK: That's right and he must have talked to Haig and found out that this was a serious program. He started asking me for more memos on this thing. At this point, of course, this sort of thing was top secret. Within the next couple of years the White House made a number of statements opening up to the public the fact that we were doing this, not what precisely we were doing, but the fact that we were working on such a system.

The person I was dealing with on this issue in the White House was a certain Major Oliver North of later fame as Colonel North. He was the one who was basically handling this for Haig. I dealt a lot with Ollie and attended meetings with him at the White House and he would come over to the State Department.

Through Kennedy I was able to get the Secretary interested and then eventually I remember when the first memo came back from the Secretary to Kennedy, asking for a memo to the President as to why the State Department was essential to this program and what role it would play. I wrote the memo from the Secretary, Schultz at the time, to President Reagan explaining in very basic terms that the president has three hats, Chief of Executive, Commander-in-Chief of the military, and Chief of State. If you are going to keep his ability to keep his three hats in an emergency, the Commander-in-Chief has to have connectivity to the military, that is evident. As Chief Executive, you have to be able to run the government so you have to have FEMA there. But, the Chief of State hat is the responsibility of the Department of State, that is international foreign relations. It is under that hat that I said you have to have the State Department working in your continuity of

government if you want to successfully carry out for example, negotiations that terminate a nuclear exchange. You have to have a president who can communicate with foreign leaders.

When I started working on this I was basically by myself. A year and a half later when I left to go on to my next assignment, I had about ten or fifteen people working for me, but not on an assignment basis. As the program grew, I went to personnel and said I need your over-complement people. I got all sorts of ambassadors and senior officers that needed something to do for several months or even a year and put them to work on this program. They, of course, did great work. It was very interesting. We did a lot of field exercises and war games. One of the things that I realized as we were going ahead in the planning was that nobody had thought about the possibility that in a nuclear exchange where Washington is destroyed and one or many successors to the president may die, that the successor president, secretary of who knows what, just might be traveling abroad and be at one of our embassies and you would find suddenly that war has started and the Secretary of Commerce, for example, who happens to be in Athens, is now the president. What do you do? You need to be able to communicate, command, travel, and all sorts of things. You can imagine the type of issues and problems that could come up related to this. So, this was an issue that I brought up and indeed I got them to take this under consideration and it led to the establishment abroad of a number of centralized stations, embassies that were able to handle this issue on a regional basis. We even did an exercise in Paris that I set up where someone played a secretary of Commerce who becomes president. We sat around in the bubble in Paris doing this exercise for a couple of days. So, there was a lot of war games, a lot of travel. For example, we had to determine where the alternate Department of State would be, what it would look like, how it would be staffed. There were lots and lots of details requiring attention in a plan like this.

So, eventually, as I said, the program was growing like mad and very substantial monies were being appropriated to it. After I left they established a real office in the Department

with a director, and it went on from there. I think by now it probably is less important than it was during the final days of the Cold War.

I believe that the establishment of this program was one of the elements in the fall of communism in the sense that the Soviets did have a very good continuity of government system and we knew a lot about it. But, nevertheless, we knew that it would be very difficult to destroy the Soviet Command and Control function with nuclear weapons. The Soviets thought the U.S. didn't have one, or a good one. Through appropriate speeches and statements, the Administration people, the White House, Ed Meese particularly, was basically telling the Soviets then, and that must have been about 1983, that we do have a new program and said, “We will prevail in a nuclear war.” This didn't mean we would win it, but we would prevail. I seriously believe that this was an element and maybe even a major element in the Soviets at a later date saying that they just simply could not keep up with everything we were doing. First the Reagan military build up and now they knew that we had a system that they believed would be, if not impossible, very difficult to knock out.

Q: Fascinating. You left the management in 1983 and where did yogo then?

FLACK: I was assigned as political counselor to the U.S. Mission tthe UN and International Organizations in Geneva.

Q: You did that from when to when?

FLACK: I did that for one year actually, 1983-84. I was political counselor there and we had an ambassador, a very nice gentleman, Geoffrey Swaebe, who was later ambassador to Belgium, a political appointee, a friend of President Reagan's. He was there for about a year, as I recall, and left and the deputy permanent representative was Marten van Heuven. A new ambassador came in, a political appointee, who was an extraordinarily difficult man. He fired Marten a month or so after he arrived. It was one of these situations where Marten, who is an extraordinarily talented, highly professional officer, was basically trying to run the mission when this totally inexperienced and very unprofessional political

appointee came in. The ambassador did not like the fact that there was somebody working under him who knew what he was doing when he didn't know what he was doing. So, he said he wanted Marten out of there and didn't want a DCM. I was political counselor so basically I became the DCM in terms of work. The Department kept on pressing the ambassador to select a deputy. After several months and talking to a number of people he finally told them he wanted Ron Flack to be his deputy. So they assigned me to the job and brought in another political counselor. So, for two years, 1984-86, I was the deputy permanent representative in Geneva and then the ambassador resigned and I was the permanent representative in charge of the mission for a year before another ambassador came in.

Q: So, you were really there from 1983 to 1987.

FLACK: Yes, I was there for four years in three different positions, political counselor, deputy permanent representative and then acting permanent representative. That was the time when there was an awful lot going on in both the international organization and UN area and in the negotiations with the Soviets which was going on in Geneva, they were reestablished there. We had the first Reagan/Gorbachev summit there in 1985 and I was the Geneva coordinator for it. It was an extraordinarily busy time and a ry important time. It was probably one of the most interesting assignments that I had in the Foreign Service in terms of getting a feeling that I was really participating in and contributing to a major world event.

Q: The office was called what and when you arrived in 1983 what waits program?

FLACK: The United Nations has its headquarters in New York but its European headquarters are in Geneva. Also in Geneva are many of international organizations, like the ILO, WHO, etc., 22 of them, that are part of the international organization system of the United Nations. So, the main UN headquarters is in New York, but also of great importance is the U.S. mission to the European headquarters of the UN in Geneva and

to the international organizations that are there. We were dealing not only with the UN activities that were in Geneva, such as ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council) meeting in the summer and the Human Rights Commission meeting in the winter, but with the activities of international organizations. We had in the mission attach#s for the various international organizations. There was the telecommunications attach#, a health attach#, a labor attach#, working with the ILO, ITU, etc. on a daily basis. The U.S. government has contact on a daily basis with all of these organizations. They had their meetings and conferences so delegations from Washington were constantly coming through. One of the offices in the mission was simply a conference office. We had an officer, two secretaries and a staff of national employees who were doing nothing but handling the visiting delegations to conferences. There was another office with two officers and a couple of national employees who were doing nothing but following the applications of U.S. citizens for work in the UN system and helping them. These offices, which were very, very useful, are now all gone because of the downsizing of the Department.

So, there was the UN side, the international organization side, then we had attached to the mission the U.S. negotiations team (with the Soviets), Ambassador Kampelman and his staff. At one point I remember I had 13 ambassadors living in Geneva. A lot of them, like Kampelman, would come and have a round of talks with the Soviets and would be there for perhaps two months, return to Washington for two months and then back to Geneva, etc. Back then there was the GATT, which now is the World Trade Organization, and we had the ambassador to the GATT and his staff, which was located in part of the mission properties, and also the U.S. ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament (CD). So, all in all, it was a very big operation.

Q: What were you dealing with the first year you were in Geneva apolitical counselor?

FLACK: The political counselor at that point was supervising the specialized attach#s, for example, the labor attach#, the health attach#, the telecommunications attach#. We had a number of officers there, like the human rights officer, who was reporting to the political

counselor. So, the political counselor was kind of a general purpose officer who was a supervising officer and was not responsible for any bilateral or multilateral political activity, because the bilateral activity was handled in Bern. But the Swiss government does have a mission in Geneva dealing with its relations with the UN, even though they are not a member of the UN, so the political counselor was responsible for the relationships with the Swiss office there as well as the Geneva authorities.

Q: You had all these people working for other outfits and they hamasters back in Washington, how did you handle these relations?

FLACK: This was one of the most difficult things about this mission. Many of these officers were Foreign Service officers. The labor and telecommunications officers were Foreign Service. We had a Foreign Service officer as counselor for refugee affairs, the UNHCR, the UN refugee organization, was in Geneva, and he had a rather large office and an enormous amount of money went through his office. So, the problem was trying to keep it all together, I discovered this when I was deputy permanent representative, because you had these offices who were off doing their own thing and reporting back to their own agencies back in Washington and the ambassador and I were trying to make sense of it all and keep it at least coordinated so everyone knew what the other guy was doing so that we weren't going off into totally different directions. But, it was very, very difficult to do because they did have their own agendas, they did have their people to report to back in Washington. If the counselor for refugee affairs had an issue with the assistant secretary for refugee affairs back in Washington it was an issue often that had very little to do with Geneva and the mission. It might have to do with some refugee camp in Thailand. It was hard to keep this group together. The weekly staff meetings were very difficult to handle because no one was really very interested in what the other guy was doing because it was so totally removed from what they were doing. It was no common thread of a bilateral relationship.

Q: Was anybody back in Washington trying to coordinate these things?

FLACK: IO, the Office for International Organizations, of course, is the home base for the mission and if anyone was doing this it would be the assistant secretary. While I was in Geneva we had two unusual assistant secretaries. The second one was Alan Keyes who is now running for president, and he came to Geneva many times and I got into a rather nasty fight with him over administrative issues after the ambassador left and I was in charge. The assistant secretary before Keyes was a very young man, a political appointee right out of the White House, who had no experience whatsoever. The White House just really wanted to find him a job and didn't think IO was an important one. It was said that the Reagan administration was purposely downgrading 10 by putting a young, inexperienced political appointee there.

Q: He was the one, I think, who was renown for calling staff meetings and giving long expositions to which everybody would kind of look up at the ceiling and wait until it was over because he didn't have very much to say. There wasn't much respect for him.

FLACK: That is true. He was what you would call a real light weight. But, that was done on purpose by the White House because at that time they didn't think multilateral affairs were something of great priority.

Q: This was the time when the Reagan administration was turninginward. They were going to do everything themselves.

FLACK: The most remarkable and exciting thing that happened while I was in Geneva was the Reagan/Gorbachev summit, the first one, in 1985. I came in 1983 and in 1984 my second ambassador came, the one that I was the deputy to. Shultz came to Geneva many, many times for meetings with the Soviets getting things back on track to restart the negotiations. At that point I realized that this was going to happen and I remember having a meeting with the ambassador telling him, “You know, as soon as these talks get started, when we talk seriously with the Soviets, we can expect that there will be talk of a Reagan/Gorbachev summit and my guess would be that it will be here in Geneva. We had better

start thinking about that because we will be responsible for it." Well, he didn't pay much attention to that. He thought I was kind of dreaming wildly, or something. But, indeed that is exactly what happened. They came in November, 1985 and had their meeting. The decision was made in the summer, I think it was July, to hold the meeting in Geneva, and the first White House contingent of 15 people arrived on August 1 and we began our work with the Soviet mission and the Swiss. I was not involved much in the substance of what was going to be discussed between Reagan and Gorbachev, but very much involved in all of the details and arrangements. Where the President and Mrs. Reagan were going to stay, the agenda, what the Swiss would be doing, what activities they would have, Mrs. Reagan's program, etc. All of these things were organized by the mission in coordination with the White House. In the end, it turned out very well.

Q: How did you find the White House staff when it came out to starworking?

FLACK: I have had a lot of experience over the years, not only in Geneva, with the people from the White House and they are always extraordinarily difficult to work with. They have a very narrow view of the work they are doing and they tend to focus on just the particular job at hand and they don't see the wider implications of what they are doing. So, it is very difficult when they are telling you they want to do something and you say, "Be careful because you have to think of this implication or that implication." They don't like that. They think you are just causing problems. In meetings with foreign officials they are always aggressive and offensive, especially the secret service. They always are, it kind of goes with the territory for them. They have a job to do and have a certain mentality and attitude and creates a lot of bad will for the United States abroad.

Q: Were you both preparing your counterparts of the Swiss and otherfor this beforehand and then cleaning up afterwards?

FLACK: Absolutely. I have often said that when you have a presidential visit, and I have had them elsewhere, I hope relations between the U.S. and the other country involved will

survive the visit. In this case, it was U.S. and Swiss relations because they were basically the host country. I also, of course, was working closely with our ambassador in Bern.

Q: Who was that?

FLACK: It was John Cabot Lodge, who was a very old man, in his eighties. I don't know if you know his story, he was a movie actor in the twenties and thirties and was a political appointee.

Q: He was in the "Scarlet Empress" with Marlene Dietrich.

FLACK: That's right. He also did a film with Shirley Temple wheshe was a little girl.

There was a great deal of friction between my ambassador at the mission and Ambassador Lodge, as to who was going to be the most important of the two ambassadors involved with this visit. Obviously we were the ones who were doing the work and Bern wasn't, but Bern felt they were the representatives to Switzerland. In terms of protocol they were absolutely right, the president was coming to Switzerland. For example, who was going to meet the president at the bottom of the steps? Should it be Ambassador Lodge or should it be my ambassador in Geneva? They had a very bitter time over this. Strangely enough I found this really laughable, that two grown men would be doing this, but in fact they were.

Q: At one point people used to fight duels over points of protocol. A presidential visit, particularly one of this magnitude, will tax the most organized of people and here is somebody who has almost dismissed the professionals from his view. How did this political appointee ambassador, whom we will leave unnamed, respond to the visit?

FLACK: Basically, he didn't deal with it. I was in charge of the arrangements for the meeting. He attended a few of the meetings and was involved in it in a certain way, but he was not involved in any really serious way of actually making decisions, etc. About half of

his day was spent on the phone to Washington. I don't know who all he was talking to but he had been involved with a consulting firm back in Washington and I think a lot of his calls were back to that firm and the White House. He knew Mike Deaver very well, for example. I remember once he said, “Well, call Mike Deaver” and I didn't know Mike Deaver and said, “Give me his number.” He gave me his number and I dialed the number thinking I would get Mike Deaver's secretary, but he answered. That was his personal number so I know that they did indeed have a close relationship. So, he was on the phone to Washington a lot but I think he was much more concerned about the domestic politics of the visit. Who will get something out of this type of thing. That is what he basically was interested in.

Q: How did you find the Swiss to deal with, particularly on thioccasion?

FLACK: The Swiss can be very strict, very difficult and very serious and in fact they are also very efficient, very good at this. I remember someone in Washington saying after having dealt for a couple of months on these arrangements describing Switzerland as the nicest police state in the world. That is what it is. They are really in control of what is going on in their country. They were good to deal with and even survived the secret service. I remember one particular meeting when we were making arrangements for things at the airport and the director of the airport was present. The secret service, as they always do, handed the director of the airport a lapel pin for him to wear so they could know who was who in the crowd, etc. He took it and said, “I'm not going to wear this. Why should I wear this?” They very patiently explained to him that it helped them know who was a member of the party and he said, “Look. I am the director of this airport, everybody knows me. I don't have to wear anything like this in my airport. I am not going to wear this.” The secret service was getting more and more put out and anxious to have him do this. He finally shouted at them, “Give me one good reason why I should wear something like this?” The secret service agent looked at him and said, “We don't shoot people that are wearing these.” The director turned red and shut up. It caused a diplomatic incident. He went to his

government and complained that he had been threatened by the secret service. This kind of thing is always difficult but to be expected.

The Swiss are just very well organized for things like this. Their police are very effective. The local Swiss official who I dealt with, his title was chief of protocol but he was really the political officer of the region, of Geneva, not the Swiss government. You know Geneva is almost independent. I remember during the conference there was going to be a press conference, Shultz and Gromyko were going to be there, and we were waiting for them. I remember talking to Andre, the Swiss official, and saying, “I understand Gromyko is going to be about half an hour late.” He said, “No, he's not.” He then said, “Well, I was just told he was going to be half an hour late.” He said, “No he's not.” He then said, “Ron, it is impossible that you are better informed than I am.” He was very sure of himself and he was right, Gromyko came in on time.

It was a very tense time. Security, as you can imagine, was incredibly tight. My wife, who is French born, was Nancy Reagan's interpreter. She visited a drug rehabilitation center, a school, laid the cornerstone of the new International Red Cross museum, and things like that.

Q: How did you find dealing with the Soviets?

FLACK: It went well. The Soviets were secretive but we got what we needed. There certainly was no openness about it. Things basically went well and in the end I can't think of any major problem that involved the Soviets. We gave the reception at the beginning and the Soviet ambassador gave the reception the next night. When I went to his reception he was decked out in all his ribbons and I said to him, “Mr. Ambassador, You look great in your uniform with all your medals. You will get another one after this visit.” He said, “I just hope I will be able to keep the ones I have!”

Q: Were there any last minute problems or any stories about thimeeting?

FLACK: The stories that I have, and I have lots of them, are administrative type anecdotes about where Reagan stayed or about the chairs that Reagan and Gorbachev sat in, etc. I was not involved, of course, in the substantive discussions, except only on a peripheral basis. Not many people were. The mission in Geneva is a very big mission. One of the wonderful facilities it has is a very large international style conference room. For a press conference we put bleachers around the insides of the room because we had an enormous amount of press, as you can imagine. Shultz and Gromyko were having a meeting with just a couple of people around them in one of the offices of the mission and there were dozens of hanger-ons at the assistant secretary and under secretary level from the Department and the White House that were just milling around in the hall waiting for them to come out. The room was ready for the press conference half a hallway away and I said, “Let's go into the conference room and wait there. There is no point hanging out in the hall here.” No one would move to the reception room where the press conference was going to be. I soon realized what the reason was when Shultz and Gromyko came out and then proceeded to come into the press room, where all of the cameras were on them, this group wanted to be following as closely behind as possible to make it look as if they were part of the negotiations. If they were already in the room, everyone would have seen that they, of course, were not with the Secretary in the meeting and, of course, that would ruin their credibility. There was a lot of that going on.

There were far too many people from Washington, from the Department and all the other agencies. We had a thousand people from the White House. We had 35 servants from the White House.

Q: Of course, from the historical point of view this was a very important meeting because this is the beginning of a real change. Reagan had talked about the evil empire, the Soviet Union, from the far right of the political spectrum anGorbachev was a new man. And, these two hit it off starting at this point and things flowed from that. So, it was not just one of these humdrum summits with a lot of people.

FLACK: I do think it had a tremendous impact on Gorbachev, particularly. I think he came to realize the importance of the Reagan administration here and the president and of the weight of the responsibility that he had in this negotiation. That was the beginning of perestroika and glasnost. That was when they began to realize that they weren't doing things right, that there were better ways of doing things. Someone told me that when Gorbachev was on one of his visits to the States, he and the president were on a helicopter going up to Camp David or something, and they were flying over the northern part of Washington into Maryland and Gorbachev was looking at all these subdivisions which from the air looked beautifully laid out. He looked at Reagan and said, “How do you do that?” Reagan apparently told his aides afterwards that it is mind-boggling to even think about how you would answer a question like that. It goes back to the very basics of economics. The question of “How do you do that” showed the intellectual limits Gorbachev had and the need he felt to really do things differently and learn.

Q: What was the feeling you were getting after the summit from thpeople who had been involved in this?

FLACK: It was very, very up. It was a highly successful meeting. You may recall that some of the meetings following it in Iceland, etc. were less successful. This was the first one and the one where they really got together for the first time and got to know each other. It was beautifully orchestrated, if I do say so myself. I certainly had a lot to do with it, but a lot of people in the White House were good at this as well. We were able to provide the type of environment that was really conducive, I think, to very, very good talks. When everybody left, we had a lot of work to do to clean up, so to speak, but we felt that we had been a part of an historic occasion and that it made a difference.

Q: Did you get any feelings both dealing with the Soviets and otherbefore and after, that there was a change in atmosphere?

FLACK: No. Again, the Soviet mission in Geneva is a very large modern mission, but it is also very closed and we didn't have a lot of contact with them. Relations with them were certainly cool. Where we did have a relationship with them which was developing very rapidly was with Ambassador Kampelman's team who were negotiating with them on the nuclear question. There the Soviets had teams of negotiators and we had our teams and they met on a regular basis. This was a much more open and almost social thing. They obviously had their serious meetings, but there was a lot of receptions where you got to talk to the Soviets. Over a period of time you saw the attitude of the Soviets become more and more open and constructive.

I remember a luncheon that I gave for UN Ambassador Dick Walters with the Soviet minister of justice. We had the Soviet ambassador and I was acting permanent representative at that point, and Walters' deputy was with him. During this lunch Walters was really pushing the Soviets on human rights and criticizing them in a very severe and aggressive way. I kept on thinking to myself that the Soviets were going to get up and walk out. Instead, these people were almost apologetic saying, “Your are right and we need to change and we are working on it. But, give us time.” It was just a totally different attitude at a very high level than I had ever seen before. Before they would have been defensive and accused us of who knows what and maybe even walked out. Here they were apologetic and saying they were going to try to do better. It was a really big change.

Q: What was your impression of dealing with the cadre of United Nations personnel?

FLACK: For the most part they were really highly effective international civil servants. These people are highly professional, highly experienced and, I must say, highly paid. During my time there I was very critical, as were a lot of Americans, of the generosity of the UN system to their people not only in pay but in terms of benefits. I think that has changed to a certain degree since then, but back then they were certainly very generous. But, they were very good people.

Also, I must say, I was very impressed by the level of representation that other countries send to Geneva. For most countries, Geneva is a very important diplomatic posting. For the United States it is not. It is a secondary one, a political give away. This is sad because other countries do have their finest people there and they know our system and they know we don't have our best people in Geneva. For example, I found when I was deputy, the other ambassadors dealt with me, they didn't deal with the ambassador because they knew he was a political hack that landed there because he knew the president and was not a very effective ambassador. They discounted him. When anything of a serious nature came up, they called me, which was frankly the right thing to do because very often the ambassador simply wouldn't know what to do with it.

Q: It must have been a very difficult position to be in when acting as the deputy people bypassed the ambassador and he becomes aware of it. How did you deal with this?

FLACK: I don't think he cared that much, actually. He cared much more about things like how the furniture was arranged in the mission. I remember the first thing he did when he arrived was to ask the GSO to come up to his office and asked him about the maintenance of the automobiles. He wanted to know, for example, when you changed the tires, do you break the beads on the old ones. These were the kind of questions he was asking. It wasn't who is the French ambassador and what are the issues with the human rights commission and things like this. He was only interested in administrative details.

Q: Well, he was an auto parts dealer.

FLACK: Exactly, he was. One of the horrible situations I got to and one of the reasons that I had this very nasty argument with Alan Keyes after the ambassador left, was while he was there he changed the configuration of the mission several times. For example, I as DCM changed my office four times while he was there. The building was brand new having been opened in 1980. The FBO had done a wonderful construction job. The ambassador's and DCM's offices were on the top floor next to each other, perfectly done. The first thing

he did was to kick me out of the DCM's office there. He didn't want me there. He put the conference room in the DCM's office. Then he moved me to another floor, etc. He cut into his own office and put a partition down it so that he could put his secretary, another secretary that he had brought in, in the other half of it. This really screwed things up because it was an office made with a restroom along the side and the partition cut him off from that. It just made a mess of it. It was like this all through the mission. He would walk through the mission and move desks and tell people to sit there instead of here, etc.

Well, after he left, the first thing I did was to put things back in order. I took down the partition in his office because I knew a new ambassador would eventually be coming in and I put my office back to where it was supposed to be. I put everything back the way FBO had designed it. Before I did this I talked to the assistant secretary for Administration and the FBO people and asked if it was okay with them. They said that it was fine. Well, the ambassador had left in place one of his executive assistants, a political type, and was trying to get him a job in Geneva, so he was hanging around. Of course he saw what I was doing and called up the ambassador, who at this point had resigned and no longer had any affiliation with the Department of State, and told him what I was doing. The ambassador then called Alan Keyes and told him that Flack was ruining everything he had done in Geneva to make things better and he should stop it. I got these phone calls from Alan Keyes asking what was going on. I explained it to him and he said, “Look, you may be right but this is kind of risky. Don't screw around with it, just leave it the way it is.” I said, “No, the mission is a mess and needs to be put right. It is not operating effectively because it is physically disrupted.”

So, when he tried to stop me from putting things straight, I said, “This is a minor issue. This is an issue of local management. You shouldn't be involved in this at all. The ambassador is gone and resigned and has nothing to do with this and I am going to put it right. I have the blessing of the appropriate people in the Department to do it and I'm sorry Alan, I am going to do this.” He, of course, was furious with me for making the departed

ambassador angry and this cost me a couple of years on my career path because he obviously took it out on me at evaluation time.

Q: What was your impression of Keyes?

FLACK: Brilliant. Keyes has got an incredible mind. He is one of the brightest men I have ever known. In multilateral meetings he is on top of every issue. His mind is usually three steps ahead of everybody else around the table. At the same time he is thinking about issues, he loves to think up analogies or little things that he can relate to and make a story. At one meeting we were going through a number of things with seventeen countries and he was drawing a little diagram trying to relate this to some little story that he could tell about men going down a river rowing the boat and somebody is rowing the other way. He said, “Isn't that kind of like this meeting?” I had no idea what he was trying to get to but sort of nodded. When he spoke he described the meeting in terms of this analogy of men rowing the wrong way or something like that.

He was and is still very, very bright. Unfortunately, I think he is a reactionary in terms of politics but he has a right to that. I don't think he was very effective as assistant secretary in this respect because he was so outspoken and brusk. He had very strong opinions and his way of presenting them often was not very diplomatic. He was not liked by his UN counterparts.

Q: You were there during the beginning of the Reagan period. Did you feel the sort of disdain that the White House had for the international organizations at all at your level at the beginning and did you see any change?

FLACK: I felt it in the beginning in a very abrupt way. I was arriving just as the Reagan policies were falling into place. I remember one of the unpleasant policy dilemmas that I had was with the World Health Organization. The Carter administration had come up with a plan that was put forward to WHO to come to an international agreement that international pharmaceutical companies would agree to limit the way they market in

developing countries. There was this problem of too much competition and too many developing countries spending unnecessarily large amounts of their scarce foreign exchange for pharmaceuticals when it was actually a duplication of what they were buying elsewhere, too many companies selling similar products. The WHO and the Carter administration were trying to address this problem by having the drug companies agree to cooperate and coordinate in their distribution and marketing in developing countries. This was a Carter administration initiative that was going forth nicely in WHO and was going to be supported by many countries. It was going very well. Then we a cable as we were going into one of these meetings, reversing the policy 180 degrees, saying we withdraw our support of our own proposal, it is not a good idea. Obviously this was major politics going on back here in Washington, but the result was I had to go in and reverse our stand on our own initiative. That is not the only time I have had to do that in my career.

Q: What was the impression of Jean Kirkpatrick when she was ouchief representative to the UN?

FLACK: She came to Geneva several times while I was there and she was always received very well with a great deal of respect and I think was very highly regarded. She is an absolutely brilliant person, an excellent speaker and really knew her subject inside and out and was learning on the job in an exceptional way. For example, I remember something she told a group of us once in terms of human rights. She said that before she came into the job at the UN, she never really considered the Human Rights Commission to be a terribly effective group, that it was really a lot of talking and didn't amount to much. But, she said that she found out on a very personal level that she personally could make a difference by working on these things. She said that during one of the Human Rights Commission meetings, a dissident got to her and said, “Would you call the minister in this particular country and complain about this particular dissident and see what you can do about getting him out?” She said that she was reluctant to do it but the case looked good, she had researched it, and she said that she would do it. She called and got the guy out. She said that she suddenly realized that you could make a difference, that things could

be done in cases where you studied it and saw that there was an injustice and that even on an individual level, but certainly on a collective level, you can make a difference and something good can come of it. So, she changed her opinion and became more favorable to human rights activities.

Q: Did you have much contact with the other delegations?

FLACK: Oh, yes. Regularly. We met on a regular basis in various groupings. I was the co-chair of what was called the Geneva Group. One of the functions of the American mission and the British Mission, the other co-chair was the British DCM, was to chair a small group of donors, the most important donors to the UN system. We had a group of six or seven major donors to the UN system that met regularly as kind of an oversight group. We were kind of an informal OMB. We would meet and discuss, for example, the budget of the ILO and look at it from a very critical point of view, because we were all interested in trying to save money, and made suggestions to the management of the organization about how we thought it could be trimmed, changed or improved. These organizations listened very carefully to what we had to say because they knew they were talking to their major donors. So, this was a very important group and we worked on a regular basis with these other countries, the French, the British, the Japanese, etc.

In other forums we would work regularly with many other missions, perhaps with the members of Human Rights Commission, which would change, or others. It would depend on the forum. From time to time you would have the full Geneva representation. As I mentioned before, other countries send their top people to Geneva, so you have very high level and very competent representation from other countries.

Q: Did you have a problem with them from time to time over the Reagan administration? The Reagan administration was a real change and like most administrations when you have almost a total change in the American political thrust overseas, there is a learning curve. It takes a while for the shake down to learn the territory and responsibilities and find

that you are not going to make an earthly difference just because you think it is right in international affairs.

FLACK: Yes. Due to the type of representation that we have abroad, especially in Europe, and especially in Geneva, at that time at least, we didn't have an ambassador who could make a big difference in terms of really explaining the Reagan agenda. So, the local ambassadors and UN people basically looked to Washington. They read the “Tribune.” They read the “New York Times.” They listened to CNN to find out what was going on in Washington. In the first part of the Reagan administration, I think there was a great deal of almost amusement. They thought that Reagan was the movie actor, the cowboy, etc. As time went on I think they began to see that this was a serious administration that had a real agenda. But, I don't think in Geneva that we did a very good job of conveying that. We tried to do things, for example, the State of the Union speech by inviting the diplomatic corps to see the speech, either direct or on tape. Such occasions were mildly attended. But, we didn't have a major voice in Geneva , as we should have had, to put our story forward.

Q: Did any events intrude on your work in Geneva like the problems in Central America with Nicaragua, El Salvador, the Grenada invasion, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, etc.?

FLACK: All of these things one way or another involved us in Geneva because there are so many organizations that were involved in them or through the embassy in Bern. You mention Nicaragua. Faith Whittlesey was ambassador after Lodge and her major issue was Nicaragua and the Contras. She made a real campaign out of it at the embassy with the Swiss, much to their annoyance. We felt it down in Geneva. It became an issue almost everywhere.

The invasion of Grenada occurred while I was there. I remember that very well because one of the groups that we dealt with very closely was the ICRC, the International Committee of the Red Cross, which was just about a block away from us in Geneva. I

had a very close relationship with the operations head and the president of the ICRC. I had been following what was happening in Grenada but I didn't know exactly when things were going to happen. I remember getting to my office one morning and there was a call waiting for me from the president of the ICRC. I got him on the line right away and he said, “I am calling you to remind you of the United States responsibility under the Geneva Convention for prisoners of war and we have a plane standing by at Cointrin Airport ready to go with our people to Grenada to start working on the prisoner of war problem. I need your authorization and clearance to let that plane take off and land in Grenada.” Well, I put the phone down and called the operations center and within two hours we had the authorization for them to go. But, the U.S. military was totally unaware of the ICRC responsibility to do that and had not factored in any kind of arrangement for something like that. This was one of the ways these international events impacted on us in Geneva.

Another element that I remember with the ICRC was one of the terrorist hijackings of TWA in Lebanon. The ICRC was the intermediary on that and were negotiating with the terrorists. I remember at one point I kept getting calls from the operations center asking me to tell the ICRC this and that and find out if they had met with these people, etc. and I was going back and forth. At the same time I was watching CNN. This was the time CNN was coming into its own as a very important conveyor of information internationally. I remember watching CNN and being on the phone to the operations center and they were saying, “Get over to ICRC and find out if they have arrived at the intersection where they are suppose to be meeting with these people to negotiate. Has that meeting taken place yet? What is going on? Get back to us right away?” I told the guy at the operations center to turn on CNN, that they had cameras at that intersection waiting for something to happen. “I can tell you right now nothing has happened yet, but turn CNN on and you can watch it.” Another one of those changes in the way that we do things.

Q: How about the hijacking of the”Achille Lauro,” did that impact aall in Geneva?

FLACK: No, I don't remember that having an effect. I do remember the bombing in Beirut and the loss of all the Marines. That was a major blow to all of our missions around the world.

Q: Did you have the feeling that the United States as far as Geneva was concerned was the mover and the shaker of events at the international organizations we were dealing with?

FLACK: Yes, very definitely. In spite of the fact that we didn't play our hand very well, in the sense we didn't have an effective ambassador there, the other missions and organizations recognized (1) the fact that we paid so much of the budget of the UN and the budget of these other organizations, and (2) the importance in Geneva of what we were doing because all of these negotiations with the Soviets were going on there and it was a very public event. Every night on television, locally, you would see the Soviets and Americans arriving for meetings, so people knew that big and important things were going on in our mission, even things that were not related to the UN. In addition to all of this, we had a very imposing mission on top of the hill overlooking the lake. So, yes, it was an important mission and everybody knew it.

Q: On a personal note, how was it like living in Geneva as far athe cost of living, etc.?

FLACK: Well, as DCM, deputy permanent representative, you don't feel that as much. You have servants, a residence, a car and things are pretty much taken care of. But, generally I would say that was at a time when the dollar was very high, at the beginning of the Reagan administration. I remember the dollar being at close to four Swiss francs. I think it is now close to two. The French franc was at 11 and now is 6. So, it was a time when people on our staff were buying Mercedes because they were cheap. The cost of living was not a problem for us then because of the strength of the dollar. It is a lovely city. Most people don't realize that Geneva is really a small town, population of 150,000. If you take the whole metropolitan area it comes up maybe to 300,000. So, it is not a very big place.

Big name, but not a very big place. However, it is close to France, close to Italy. You have the Alps and the skiing. Our Monday morning staff meeting in the winter usually began with the casualty report, to see who was in a cast, and there were a lot of them. We had to be very careful at our mission about people in wheelchairs because there were several people in wheelchairs who had broken legs skiing. Fortunately, the building was built at the time that you had to have wheelchair access and all that, so it took care of these people pretty well.

Q: You said you had problems with Keyes. What happened when you left in 1987?

FLACK: The last year that I was there, I was in charge because the previous ambassador had left suddenly and they weren't expecting him to leave. It took them a long time to nominate someone and get them cleared. It was a fellow who was a retired army officer who was married to a major contributor to the Republican party. My problem there was that she was the one that really wanted to be the ambassador. She even wanted to have a desk in his office and I wouldn't let her. I had a terrible time keeping her out of classified documents and the business of running the mission, which she was determined to do. It finally came down to the security officer telling her she couldn't do it and we kept her out. But, she was nevertheless a major element in everything that was going on in the mission. The previous ambassador had been one that was trying to do much to much and didn't know what he was doing. This ambassador was totally hands off. At the first staff meeting he told everybody, “I want you to all know that I am a hands off ambassador. Flack is the deputy and engineer and conductor on this train. I am just up front watching what is going on.” So, that was an easy one. He was also very good socially and entertained well doing some good on that side.

One of the problems I had had with the residence of the ambassador, which is a lovely old house, was that the ambassador who had left quickly, had refused to put any money into it whatsoever. He wouldn't actually sign anything. I had to sign everything. He wouldn't even sign for the payment of the servants. He didn't want his name to be on any document

that said he was spending government money. For example, the residence needed to have new wiring, and needed all sorts of things, and when he left the place was a mess because he would never let anybody do anything to it. Luckily I had a year to get the residence back in shape. Have it decorated, redone, new wiring, etc. so the new ambassador who came in and was very social had a lovely place to entertain.

Q: So, when you left, where did you go?

FLACK: As I was preparing to leave Geneva I was put up, unbeknownst to me, to be ambassador to Burkina-Faso and was told by people in AF and Personnel that I would be going. My wife has a limited medical clearance and can't go to malaria posts, and that is a malaria post. So, I called Hank Cohen, who was the deputy in personnel at that point, and said that I am very flattered but my wife can't go and I don't want to have a separation post and I would appreciate you finding me something else. Well, that was fine but they never came up with another chief of mission job so I looked for another DCMship. Copenhagen was available and I went up to see Terry Todman who was the ambassador there. We seemed to get along all right and I took the job. I went to Copenhagen in the late summer of 1987.

Q: You were in Copenhagen from when to when?

FLACK: From 1987-90, three years. Todman was there for another year and a half and then he left and a political appointee from the Bush administration came in, a very nice fellow. He was a real estate developer from Colorado by the name of Keith Brown. He and his wife were very nice people. He had been a political appointee to Lesotho. So, I was DCM to those two ambassadors in Copenhagen.

Q: In 1987 what was the situation in Denmark?

FLACK: First of all Copenhagen is a lovely posting and one of the more pleasant postings in the Foreign Service. As you could probably surmise we don't have major problems

with Denmark. In the past we had had a certain number of problems with Denmark in the NATO context because up until a couple of years before I arrived, it was a socialist government that was constantly bickering over NATO issues. Denmark had the reputation of being the footnote country in NATO because whenever NATO agreed on something and the Danes didn't there would be a footnote at the bottom explaining that Denmark disagreed and would not participate.Then a conservative government came in before I arrived under Poul Schluter and things began to change for the better from our point of view. We had a very comfortable and good relationship with the Danes under the Schluter government. One of the major issues that I had when I was there was our wanting to close some of our bases in Greenland. Just as a note of reminder to everybody, Greenland is part of the Danish realm and even though it has a home rule government, foreign relations and security are handled by Copenhagen. We have had bases in Greenland, which have been considerable over the years - I think at one point we had 12,000 people at Thule, now there is a few hundred - and as things were changing a combination of politics and technology rendered a lot of these facilities redundant or unnecessary. So, we started negotiating about closing some of them down. It became a very difficult issue because it became almost a social issue. Imagine in Greenland, which is a huge area, with a population of 45,000, half Danes and half Greenlanders, and most of those are in the capital, Nuuk, and a couple of other settlements. The rest are in tiny little villages scattered around the coast. Some of these little villages are close to an American radar station, for example, that we were going to close down. It may be a tiny little place, but it is a building and has a generator and communications and with helicopters coming in from time to time there is a certain amount of connectivity. Because of that local communities, small as they might have been, developed and became dependent upon them for everything from having a doctor, a telephone, power, etc. The station was there and always willing to help. It would fly in a helicopter if somebody was sick, for example. Now we were going to take these away and that meant that these villages in some cases were simply going to disappear or drop back into the Stone Age. This was not an easy issue to resolve.

A related issue was on the ice cap in areas where we had had installations and facilities, the trash, not toxic waste, was basically just thrown out on the ice and eventually covered over with snow and ice. Everybody knew it was there and the Greenlanders began thinking that what they could do to help them out was to demand compensation for removing the waste that was up there. This was another negotiation. The negotiations were between the Department of Defense and the government of Greenland with the State Department and the Danish government very much involved. So, most of the negotiations were held in the ministry of foreign affairs in Copenhagen but some of them were done in Greenland and in Washington. After I left they signed an agreement on this and I don't remember the details of the agreement, but there was compensation to the Greenlanders for the removal of American facilities. The base at Sondrestrom was turned over to the Greenlanders. Thule is still there but much less important. It is no longer a strategic air force base. There is still a very important radar installation up there which is important in early detection of missile lift offs in Russia.

One of the more interesting events of my tour in Denmark was in the summer of 1989, Keith Brown was ambassador and Queen Margrethe, who goes to Greenland from time to time, decided to make one of her periodic visits and visit Thule on July 4. Technically, from a protocol point of view Ambassador Brown should have gone but he didn't. He said he wanted to stay in Copenhagen for his first Fourth of July in country, which was a big deal for him. So, Daniele and I went with the Queen and Prince to Thule. We didn't travel with the Queen but went ahead so we could spend some time in Greenland. We stopped of in the capital for a visit and then went to Jakobshavn and on to Thule to be there when the Queen arrived.

She spent five days at Thule. Now Thule is a pretty isolated place with not much to do and you would wonder why she would spend that much time there. Well, first of all the Queen truly loves Greenland. She spends time there, knows the country and the people and is rather a remarkable person in that sense. There are several villages close by to Thule that

depend on the base being there and she visited them, spending a whole day in each one. So, two days right there were spent in the villages. The bachelor quarters there do have a couple of VIP suites. My wife and I were in one and the Queen and Prince Henrik were right above us in very spartan VIP accommodations. We gave a dinner party for them at the Top of the World Club at Thule, the officers club up there, which is a rather pleasant, run of the mill American Air Force officers club. We did a first class job. The commanding general from Colorado Springs came out to be there with us because we were kind of co-hosting this visit. We put on an incredible dinner for the Queen's entourage of about 15 people and the VIPs from Greenland and the military. I think we had about 50 or 60 people for dinner. Special wine, flowers, and some food was all imported. It was really a wonderful occasion.

The Queen was appropriately impressed and so was Prince Henrik. Prince Henrik is French born and has a chateau in the middle part of France and grows his own wine. We had brought in some of his own wine, a good year, to surprise him. He was very pleased with this. I remember also, because the Queen was so knowledgeable on all these foods that we were serving, because it was local fish, I had to learn all about what was on the menu. She was sitting next to me and as we started eating the fish dish, and I commented on what lovely Arctic sole it was and she looked at her plate and then at me and said, “That is not Arctic sole.” I said, “Oh, really? I was told that it was.” She said, “No, no, this is such-and-such a fish. It is very close to what you said, but it isn't. However, don't worry about it.”

The other thing about the Queen of Denmark is that she is a chain smoker and you have to know if you are going to be around her that you have to have a lighter or matches, because even during meals she smokes between courses. She has a particular brand of Egyptian cigarettes that she smokes, so you don't offer her one unless you have her brand. A lot of people who are around her in Denmark do carry her brand so that if they

happen to be next to her and she is looking around, she can get one of her cigarettes. We didn't have her cigarettes, but did have a lot of matches and lighters around.

She and her husband are very nice people. They are very easy to talk to. I must say there is an interesting difference here. She speaks excellent English but her English is formal and a bit stilted, so when you are speaking to her in English its formal and stilted but nevertheless very easy. However, the family language is French because her husband is French and they spend a lot of time in France. Her two sons are very francophone. Well, my wife and I speak fluent French and when we were with them I found that it was easier to switch to French. In French the royal couple are very different. They are much more relaxed, much more amusing, simply because they are more comfortable in it and it is their family language. So, basically, when Danielle and I were with Margrethe and Prince Henry it was in French and we had a good time with it.

Q: How did you find Terry Todman as ambassador?

FLACK: First of all he has a nickname, Terrible Terry, and before I went to Copenhagen several of my friends said not to go to work for Terrible Terry because he has the reputation of being very difficult to work for. He had been there for several years and I thought that was all right because I wouldn't be there with him long, I would get another ambassador. Well, it turned out that it was 18 months and I did have problems with Todman. Let me say first of all that Todman is probably one of the most highly competent and professional Foreign Service officers, if not THE most competent professional I have ever known. He is extremely able and wonderful with people. I found he was wonderful with the Danes. He is an extremely accomplished diplomat. The problem from my point of view was his management of the embassy and his interface with the American staff, which was virtually nil. He was a closed door ambassador. He wasn't the type of guy who says, “My door is open at all times.” It was always closed and therefore we had communication problems. He didn't feel that I was communicating with him enough. I didn't feel that he was communicating with me or the staff enough. For example, he never,

not once, came into my office. Now, that is his prerogative, of course. It was difficult and he did not appreciate me and the relationship kind of fell apart. Luckily for me, we were inspected. I say luckily because the inspectors saw what I called the deficiencies in the way he was interfacing with the staff and the reports were favorable to me, I think, and critical of him. Nevertheless, I am a very big admirer of Terry Todman as a professional and as a diplomat, he is extremely able.

Q: Was there any impact by the reunification of Germany, the falling a part of the Soviet Union and all? You were there when this was just beginning to happen.

FLACK: Yes, it was beginning to happen and it was felt very much in Denmark. Denmark, of course, is very close. It has a border with Germany and is close to East Germany and Poland and the Baltic. Denmark has traditionally had close relations with the Baltic countries and this was blossoming again as these countries were approaching independence. These were major political developments in Denmark and the population as a whole felt them. There are quite a few Germans in Denmark. On the other hand, the Danes have an unfortunate distaste for the Germans because of World War II. There are still very bad feelings about the Germans in Denmark. At one point a number of years ago the wealthy Germans were buying summer homes in Denmark to the point where the Danes passed a law saying they couldn't do it because they were afraid all of their nice summer home property was being bought up by the wealthy Germans and they didn't want this to happen. But, the Danes, especially since reunification, have become even closer to the Germans economically than they were before. They have always been close linking their economy to a great extent to the German economy. One of the jokes in Copenhagen is something to do with how long does it take the central bank to change interest rates after the German bank changes its interest rates. The punch line is something like 30 seconds, meaning it is automatic.

Q: At this time, 1987-90, we are also talking about another development happening in Europe, the development of the European Union. This was really gathering momentum.

One of our desires in Europe has always been to get them together so they won't fight each other, stop these sort of European civil wars. Was there any disquiet or discomfort on our part during the time you were there about economic unification in Europe?

FLACK: There was in Denmark a certain distancing from the move towards union. The Danes do feel apart because of their connection with Scandinavia. You know, shortly have my arrival in Copenhagen, I remember the under secretary of the foreign ministry for political affairs, who became a very good friend of mine, Benny Kimbery, who just died last spring, told me that Danish foreign policy is based all on multilateral arrangements. It is based on NATO, the UN, the Nordic union and the EU. One of the places where they were running into friction or contradictions was their relationship with their Nordic counterparts. There is a difference between the Nordics and the Scandinavians, the Scandinavians being Norway, Sweden and Denmark, and the Nordics including Finland and Iceland. The Scandinavian relationship is very, very close. They work very closely, have open borders between them for certain things. Denmark was pulled between becoming part of the EU and having to open their borders to the south, but Norway, for example, is not a member of EU. Where do we draw the border? Is it with Norway or with Germany. This has never really been totally answered, basically, because there are these competing ideas of what Denmark is. Is it Scandinavian or European. So far Denmark is not going to become a EURO country, not joining itself with the common currency. They are not entirely convinced that they want to be in this union.

Q: Were there any other developments during this time?

FLACK: We had some visits. Schultz came to Denmark while I was there to talk about NATO and so did Baker. One of the interesting things about Denmark besides Greenland, which is part of the Danish realm, is the island of Bornholm. If you look at the map and look way out in the Baltic, above East Germany and Poland, south of Sweden, there is an island called Bornholm which is Danish. Bornholm has always been a very sensitive island because it had very sensitive communications facilities for tracking submarines and

all sorts of interesting things and was very important to NATO. I did visit Bornholm. One of the things I did in Denmark was to travel a lot in the country, give a lot of speeches, and to Greenland and to Bornholm. The only place which I did not go and which is another Danish possession is the Faeroe Islands which is up north off the coast of Norway. Bornholm is a very interesting island, a very unusual place, and if you want to go in the summer it is a lovely place.

Q: I think some of the MIGs landed there at one time.

FLACK: That's right. Denmark is a very interesting country in the sense that it is European and Scandinavian at the same time. You know, the Scandinavians consider the Danes to be the Latins of the Scandinavian group. They consider them to be kind of slow, lazy, and fun loving.

Q: That's because of the warm weather there.

FLACK: That's right, they are the soft ones of the group. The Danes are very close to the Norwegians because Norway was part of Denmark at one time, but there is a certain amount of animosity with the Swedes, just like there is between Norway and Sweden. Nevertheless they have very strong social and cultural ties. I often noted that when the minister of justice of Denmark had an issue he would simply call up his counterpart in Sweden and discuss it directly with him. I often thought their foreign services must be very frustrated because much of their business is simply carried on on a principal to principal basis and their embassies are left out of it entirely.

Q: In 1990 you left for where?

FLACK: In 1990 I left for Paris for the COCOM job, the CoordinatinCommittee for Multilateral Strategic Export Controls.

Q: How did you get this job?

FLACK: As I was finishing up in Copenhagen I was basically at a point in my career where as an OC I was probably backed up against the idea of having to retire in a couple of years. Frankly, I wanted to go back to Paris again. The only job that was available at that point was the head of the U.S. delegation to COCOM which was an OC job and I thought it would be interesting. I contacted a couple of people in the Department and I was assigned to it rather easily because not many people wanted that job. The COCOM job was traditionally felt to be not very important and one that was not terribly career enhancing. Well, at this point in my career I thought I may have to retire a couple of years anyway and that is okay.

Q: OC being what?

FLACK: The first level of the senior service.

Q: Sort of like a brigadier general.

FLACK: Exactly. That is the counselor level, then you go to minister-counselor and so on. As it turned out I got the promotion through that job to minister-counselor, which was surprising and unexpected in the sense that this was not a job that normally would be career enhancing in that respect.

Q: You were there from 1990 to when?

FLACK: From 1990 to 1995 and there were a number of reasons for staying on so long. First of all after I got there I realized this job was not the low level uninteresting job that it had the reputation of being. During the Reagan administration the whole concept of strategic controls and using strategic controls against the Soviet Bloc and the Soviet Union, in particular, had been renewed and invigorated and enhanced. It was at that point that they raised the level of the job there to OC from an O-1 job. The reason being they

wanted to emphasis the importance of the program, use it more vigorously and increase the size of the delegations, which was actually going on by the time I got there.

Let me go back a little bit and talk about COCOM in the historiperspective.

Q: And what was it designed to do?

FLACK: First of all as I mentioned it is the coordinating committee for multilateral strategic export controls, or COCOM. The French never called it that. It was a bilingual language committee in French and English and the French called it something entirely different. The French translation doesn't have the same meaning. They called it the Coordinating Committee for East-West Exchange, which is entirely different.

Q: In our language it would mean promoting people going from one tthe other.

FLACK: The French were so sensitive originally about doing anythinthat might upset anybody they wanted something very innocuous.

Following World War II in the late 1940s, there was a dispute between the United States and the UK over the shipment of copper wire to the Soviet Union to the point where John Foster Dulles and Winston Churchill were actually exchanging communications on this. It highlighted the problem that was emerging at that point about what do we do when you have the sale of a strategic item to one of the Communist countries that we had some concerns about. How do we handle this? I guess there was a very informal gathering of certain NATO countries to discuss this problem and how it might be faced. Well, it turned into an informal grouping of the NATO countries that would get together on a periodic basis and simply discuss the problem. Eventually this informal get together was called the coordinating committee for multilateral strategic export controls.

So, it started very informally and it was never formalized. COCOM was never a formal organization. It never had a charter, a signed agreement of anything. It was a handshake

among its members that we would get together and talk about exports to the Soviet bloc. As time went on into the fifties this idea of talking about it grew more institutionalized in the sense that there were rules and regulations and formalities that were established informally through meetings. They would say, “Can one country simply veto the sales of another?” Well, it turned out through discussions to be “yes.” The procedures and submission of cases were developed this way. There developed a list of goods that would be concerned and eventually there turned out to be three lists. There was the military list, which was rarely used because nobody was going to export guns and arms to these countries in the first place. There was the nuclear list which was of concern and then the most interesting one and most active one which was called the dual use industrial list which were those items that might be sold that could be used in a civilian function but could also be used in a military way.

For example, a powerful computer that was ordered by some university or public institution of some sort. That could also be diverted and used by the Soviet military. An item like this, if it were then put on the list of excluded items that were not to be sent to the Communist Bloc and if one of the countries in the organization decided that they wanted to do that being convinced it was a benign sale and not of military use, they would bring it to the committee and say, “We have an exception from the list request. We think this is a good sale and want the committee to approve it and here is why.” They would make the argument why this item should be approved as an exception to the embargo list. The information would all be taken down and sent back to the various capitals to be looked at. In the United States it would be the Departments of Commerce, State, Defense, CIA and possibly Department of energy if it were a nuclear matter. They would give their opinion in an intergovernmental process and come up with the position of the country. In the case of the U.S. we would come back to that meeting and say “yes, we agree it is okay to sell” or “no, we don't agree.” Any country had a veto. If the French didn't like the proposal for an American sale that we thought was okay, they could veto it and then we would not sell it. So, it was this rather extraordinary informal arrangement where members could lookover

proposed sales of strategic materials to these countries and decide on the basis of the information they were given, the information they had and on their own policies whether or not they would allow it.

Today, only a couple of years after its demise, one wonders at the possibility of doing such a thing these days. It is almost unheard of that countries would actually give up a little bit of their sovereignty like they did to each other to agree on a multilateral basis to submit themselves to this type of scrutiny and control on the basis of multilateral action. So, it was an extraordinary arrangement. One, as I said, that was informal, a gentlemen's agreement and probably the reason it worked so well. At any given point the country knew that this was nothing that they were entirely tied to. If the French really wanted to make a sale and the German's were saying “no.” in the back of their minds the French knew they did not have to go by this and if they really wanted to do it they could go ahead and do it. That did happen on occasion but not very often. The Brits did it once. Margaret Thatcher disagreed with something and went ahead and made a sale, much to the consternation of the other members. So, I think the fact this system did work was partially due to the fact that it was not a signed agreement.

Q: I would like to talk about some of the issues you dealt with because this is an extremely interesting time. The Soviet Union ceased to be the Soviet Union during this period and things were changing so rapidly that suddenly our concern was more about collapse rather than threat. But also the dynamics between the countries that you saw when you first arrived and did this change. And did commercial rivalries get involved.

FLACK: It did, of course. Before I get into those, let me say in terms of membership originally it was NATO members that were members. It was expanded in the sixties and seventies to include Australia and Japan because of their capabilities in the strategic field. By the way it was NATO minus Iceland. Iceland never participated, I guess, because simply they weren't an exporting country. So, we had these countries sitting around a table every Tuesday in Paris. Now the headquarters was located in Paris in an annex

of the embassy called the D Building. The secretariat was about 35 people headed by a chairman or president that was usually not an American. For many, many years the Italians had the presidency simply because of almost tradition. But, after I arrived in 1990 the Italian chairman had been sent off as ambassador to The Hague, I think, and a Dutch chairman took over who was there until the organization was ended. The fact that COCOM had been originally established because of U.S. initiatives and the fact that we were always the most active in it and the fact that it was located in the U.S. embassy, which probably was a mistake, it probably should not have been, made the other members feel that they were participating in a U.S.-controlled organization or one where there certainly was high U.S. influence, which really wasn't true. The secretary was pretty independent and so were the chairmen.

All of the members had at their embassies in Paris people on their staff that were delegated to represent them at COCOM. Except for the U.S., French, British, Germans, and Japanese, these delegates were mid-grade officers in their embassies. But the countries I mentioned did have full blown delegations. I had eight or ten people on my delegation. The Japanese had five or six. Of course, the French delegation was located at the foreign ministry and they had many people working on it. So, the major players did have larger delegations. There were not only the meetings of the regular committee, but there were other meetings called on occasion where delegations would be brought in from capitals to discuss updating the lists, what should be put on and what should be taken off. Given the changing nature of technology, it was very important that we do that on a regular basis.

I arrived in 1990 at the time that things were starting to really change. Strangely enough there was a delay in the impact of all this on COCOM of several years. Even after the regime in Russia changed...

Q: When you arrived it was the Soviet regime and when did it becomRussian?

FLACK: That was in 1992, I think. But during all that period of the change in Russia, nothing was changing in COCOM and for good reason. None of the governments involved, including the United States felt that it was time to give the Russians a vote of confidence in this way. They all had great concerns about the former Soviet Union republics that were now independent in terms of strategic affairs and were unwilling at that point to say we can now lighten up in this area. So, basically the whole process continued. Anything that was being exported to Russia, even when Yeltsin was president went through the same process and the members were being just as careful and giving just as much scrutiny as they did before. In the case of telecommunications there was even more scrutiny, because of the uncertainties in Russia, because of the caution that the member governments of COCOM felt they needed to use in dealing with Russia.

There was as time went on and we got into 1993, especially, there was a feeling that this was going to have to change. Yeltsin was meeting on a regular basis with our leaders and leaders of the West and the political climate was changing. We were now talking about being friends. Yeltsin personally got involved in the campaign to do away with COCOM. The first idea, during the Bush administration, of how to handle this issue of what do we do with COCOM was a good one. I think they were right on. I think it was Secretary Baker and Regie Bartholomew who had the idea of trying to very gradually bring the Russians, and others like the Ukraine, into the COCOM fold. Don't do away with the organization, create a COCOM forum as they called it. We would have meetings of the COCOM forum that would include representatives of these other countries to start talking to them about export controls. The idea being that we would eventually invite them to join this organization and change it. But, in order to do that, in order to have the confidence of the COCOM members, Russia would have to have export controls. They would have to have the confidence that if the French were going to sell something to the Russians that was of strategic value, that the Russians would be able to control where it went and it wouldn't end up in Iraq.

Q: Of course, the allied fight against Iraq was going on and we were concerned about strategic weapons going into Iran so the emphasis had begun to shift hadn't it?

FLACK: Not in COCOM. COCOM never had the mandate to control exports to anything but the list of prescribed destinations that was agreed to by the organization which was basically the Communist Bloc and after the fall of the Soviet Union it was basically China and North Korea. The other countries of concern were not of concern officially in anyway with COCOM. These countries were not under this control whatsoever. The United States tried to get the organization to include, for example, Iran, as a proscribed destination in COCOM, but most of the countries and particularly France, were vehemently opposed saying that this was not the way we should handle countries such as Iran. So, with the list of prescribed destinations dwindling and other countries of concerned not being brought in, the organization, itself, was losing its meaning. But, as I said the Bush administration had the idea of creating a COCOM forum that would bring these other countries into the fold, so to speak, gradually and using their membership, which they wanted, as a lever to get them to establish good export controls. We even had monies made available from the Congress to help them do this. Then the Clinton administration came in.

Q: January, 1993.

FLACK: That's right. At that point everything changed. As was often the case, and I have seen this time and time again in my career, when a new administration comes in, particularly one of another party, anything the previous administration was doing, even if it was eminently right, the White House people mistrust it and don't feel it is a good idea. The COCOM forum approach was immediately dropped. We didn't even mention it again. When people came up and asked what was going on with the COCOM forum meetings, all I could say was that the new administration does not believe this is the way to go forward so we are basically dropping it. This was not something we were going to do anymore.

In Yeltsin's first meeting with Clinton he brought up COCOM. He said that it was a thorn in the side of our relationship and you have to do away with it. Clinton said something like, “That's interesting, I will look into it.” I don't think he had been briefed on it at all. Yeltsin brought it up again at the second summit. This time Clinton said he was still looking into it. At the third meeting Clinton gave in. He had looked into it and his group basically said that we could give in on COCOM to them; it was no problem if it helped our relationship with Russia.

This in my view was an enormous mistake. COCOM was an organization that could have been used as a lever with the Russians to get them to establish better and efficient export controls. We did not do that. We simply threw away this lever as a negotiating tool and told the Russians we were going to close it down. We should of done it by first having a meeting with the other members and say that we would like to close COCOM down. Instead, Clinton announced it after the third Yeltsin summit. The meetings that we had after that were simply towards closing down the organization. It was eventually formally closed, I think, in April, 1994, but it wasn't until about two years later that the whole organization was finally disbanded in the sense of closing out the books and making sure everybody was off the roles that the place was actually physically closed down as it is now.

What the Clinton administration's view was, was to close down COCOM and at the same time negotiate a replacement regime. This in my view was a mistake because you can't give away your lever and then try to negotiate something. We should have kept COCOM going and saying we are going to change it but it is still going and use it as a negotiating tool. But, we didn't, we simply said that is gone and now we can start from a clean sheet.

We negotiated for about a year in various places around the world to try to establish a replacement regime for COCOM that would have hopefully some sort of reasonable authority in terms of controlling exports to other countries of concern. Here we are talking about Iran, Iraq, Libya and North Korea. But, nobody could ever agree to put that into

writing. No one could ever agree to a list of countries of concern, especially the French. So we were just spinning our wheels around and around at meetings all over the world. We finally established what is called the Wassenaar arrangement because it was finally agreed in this small town of Wassenaar outside The Hague. We couldn't even call it an organization, a regime or anything else because the French would not put up with it. Anything that had the idea of some sort of a structure they would not agree to so it was called finally “arrangement.” It is located in Vienna. We have a delegate there now who was my former deputy in Paris. But, it is an arrangement without any meaning. The members, including countries like Russia meet to discuss on a periodic basis after the fact exports of certain materials to certain countries. But since they don't meet until after the sale has been made and there is no list of countries of concern, it is all so vague that it doesn't really mean much. The Clinton administration finally agreed to it simply in terms of this would be the beginning of an ongoing negotiation to make this arrangement into something and as far as I know that has not ever happened.

Q: Did you at all feel the hand of Strobe Talbert on this because hwas sort Clinton's Russia man?

FLACK: I don't know how directly he was involved, but it was clear that the White House and, for that matter, the senior people in the Department, were unwilling to use COCOM in a strategic way in dealing with Russia. When Yeltsin said he didn't like COCOM, get rid of it, we did it. What we should have said was that we needed something from him before we do that and then work with them on it.

Q: Going back to 1990, what were the major concerns?

FLACK: There were several major concerns in terms of the types of equipment we were talking about. First of all, as I mentioned, military equipment was not something we dealt with. On the nuclear side there was also the nuclear suppliers agreement that was

handling that. So, most of it was in the dual use category. Within this area the things that were of prime importance were telecommunications, computers and machine tools.

One would wonder what is so special about machine tools. Well, machine tools in the West are capable of working to extreme precision. The Soviets were never able to build machine tools capable of working to the level of precision of the Western machine tools. We are talking here about laths and all sorts of things that basically work metals. An example would be manufacturing propellers for submarines, or the manufacturing the parts for jet engines. Jet engines made by the Soviets had to be overhauled about five times as often as engines made in the West simply because they didn't have the machine tools to make things to a precision enough so they would work more efficiently. So, machine tools were a great interest to the Soviets and they wanted that technology. They would have bought it and used it in the civilian sector but also mainly in the military sector.

Powerful computers were also of interest to the Soviets. As time went on, towards the end of COCOM, computers became an difficult problem simply because of the technology changing so fast and computers becoming more powerful and smaller. In the end you could hook up a series of small powerful PCs and have a super computer. So, it became almost impossible to control this. There were also countries outside the membership of COCOM that were starting to produce these things and we couldn't control this anyway. So, this was becoming a problem.

And finally, and most important of all, telecommunications. Here we get into the question of telecommunications to be produced in the West, particularly fiber optics, that could be used by the Russian military to use for military communications which would be a problem for the United States and for the West simply because it would be impossible for us to eavesdrop on those communications. So, we were trying desperately to keep this type of telecommunications from the Russians and for very, very important strategic reasons. This was one of the main and most important and seriously strategic issue and product that we were concerned about as COCOM was going into its final stages. It was one of the items

that they tried to hold over into the Wassenaar arrangement, which it was, but it doesn't mean anything because there is basically no control now on these things.

Q: Did Sweden play a role? One tends to think of Sweden with ratheadvanced equipment, particularly machine tools.

FLACK: Well, there were a number of countries that worked closely with COCOM over the years, Austria, Sweden, and South Korea. They followed COCOM very closely and we had an informal interface with them. They very often simply followed the COCOM rules and did not go out of bounds in that sense. South Korea in particular was very careful about meeting with us regularly asking for information. They wanted to join COCOM but we wouldn't let them, although in the end they were doing just what everybody in COCOM was doing. Sweden was very much impressed with the influence of COCOM and it would have been very unwise of them, and they knew it, to overtly do things that COCOM would be upset with.

Q: What was the threat? If Sweden got out of bounds what was the implicit threat?

FLACK: There wasn't any. I can't think of a threat. I would think that Sweden and its diplomats would simply be influenced by the disapproval and perhaps public outcry in the media. They were just not willing to not play ball in that sense.

Q: And, of course, they were concerned about the Soviet threat too.

FLACK: Yes.

Q: What about the commercial rivalries particularly between France, Germany, Great Britain and the United States? I would think there would either be horse trading or blocking.

FLACK: It was amazingly coherent. There were rivalries and commerce did interfere and make itself known in these times, however, the main thing was in the business community

in all these countries even though they do not like export controls, they know that they exist and realize that if their own national authority has an export control they like it when they know there is a multilateral control that puts them on a level playing field. If an American company because of American laws knows that they can't sell something to Russia, but are upset because French law does not have the same effect and therefore the French company can sell that product to Russia, that is not a good situation and the American company is upset. However, when there is a multilateral organization that everybody agrees to controlling this and the American companies knows they still can't sell it to Russia they have at least the comfort of knowing that neither can the French or the Germans or the Brits, etc. This was the leveling effect of COCOM and even though the private sector didn't like in many ways these controls, when they thought about it seriously they realized that it was better than no multilateral control because they then had real trouble with their own national control enforcing an embargo.So, there was rivalry and when you talked to a French businessman saying you were the U.S. representative to COCOM, he would get a kind of smirk on his face and say, “Oh, yes, COCOM. That is that American organization that keeps my company and French firms from selling abroad so that the Americans can get the market.” And, if you talked to an American businessman, as I have, and introduce myself as the representative to COCOM, they will say, “Oh, COCOM. That is the organization that let's the French and other countries get away with all the sales when we can't.” And every country you talk to have the feeling that they are being slighted in the process and that other countries are making the sales, which wasn't the case at all.

One of my jobs, and I did this on many speaking occasions, was to try to explain to the American business community that COCOM was actually good for them in the sense of this level playing field. If you have to have export controls, don't do it unilaterally, they don't work and you are simply hurting yourself because another foreign company will get the business.

By the way, another footnote here. I mentioned that I talked to business groups and so on, when COCOM first started it was an ultra secret organization. The meetings were secret to the point where men coming to the meetings would not even tell their wives where they were going. Over the years, especially in the Reagan years, it became much more transparent and open, although the meetings were secret and everything was classified, it was much more transparent and we talked about it more openly and everybody was aware of it. But, at one point its existence was not even known.

Q: As diplomats did you find that you had to call in your experts tfollow the conversation about various products?

FLACK: Absolutely, the meetings were filled with experts. If I was sitting at the head table, behind me would be people from the Departments of Defense, Commerce, Energy, CIA or whatever agency was interested in that particular meeting. The technical experts were always there in these meeting discussing these things and they were very, very important. For example, when we talked about telecommunications the NSA people were there all the time. We were discussing highly technical issues and we needed the expertise of these people. And all of the delegations were the same. Now, there were some of the delegations of the NATO countries that were kind of out of it. They were present but almost like observers, rarely participating on a technical level. Greece and Portugal for example.

Q: They weren't producing the technology.

FLACK: They weren't producing but were interested and were there to observe and were part of the process. But there were the key players who were there in force and for which this is really serious business.

Q: I have always heard of the classic situation in the State Department which I am sure is true in other countries, that basically the Pentagon says “no” to anything, the Commerce

Department says “yes” to anything and then the State Department is sort of caught between and tries to come out with something. Was this played out again, again and again?

FLACK: It was again and again. I always said that dealing with the 17 members of COCOM was not nearly as difficult as dealing with the U.S. interagency process. Getting agreement in COCOM was relatively easy, but getting a position on an issue through the interagency process was sometimes impossible. So, it was very, very difficult. You have the Department of Defense with a very strong position on an issue, the Department of Commerce with a very strong position exactly the opposite, representing the interests of the business community, and the National Security Council was often involved in these discussions. The interagency process was difficult and painful at times.

Q: Were you just carrying the word or did you get involved back in the Washington process?

FLACK: I didn't get involved personally in the Washington process except observing it from a distance, but nevertheless with communications the way they are these days between the secure phone, fax and all the other things we were doing, we were really a part of the process from Paris. On my delegation in Paris we had a Department of Defense representative, a Department of Commerce representative, and several people from the State Department and they were in daily contact with their people back in Washington, so we knew on a daily basis what was going on on each issue. So, we were deeply involved but not physically present.

Q: Were you getting relatively good intelligence about what was happening in the Soviet Union and understanding how these things could be used?

FLACK: Yes. For example, Italy decided it wanted to sell a particular machine tool to North Korea.. They said it was a benign sale and were asking for an exception from the committee. We would get all the information and they would give a considerable amount of

documentation about the product and about the end use and the end user. Each country then would send this to their capital. We would get back from Washington several weeks later, after it had gone through the U.S. intelligence community and some investigation had been done we would get reports back saying for example, we don't believe that this is a benign sale if this company that it is going to be sold to is a state-owned company and it is clear that they want to use it for usage that we would object to in this military installation, and they would give us classified information on why we thought this was a bad deal. We, of course, would give this information to the Italians and other members of COCOM so that they would have this. Or, other people would be doing this. We did it more than anybody else. We had the capability of getting intelligence on these sales much more often and more thoroughly than did other delegations. But, often the Brits, French, or Japanese would have information about a specific sale that would be put forward. Then we would all take it under consideration and it had a great influence. So, intelligence did play a role, yes.

Q: I would have thought in any multilateral organizations that the French usually turn out to be the burr under the saddle. How did it work in COCOM?

FLACK: Pretty much that way. The French had a reputation in this way and it was clearly earned in COCOM. The French were basically disliked on a substantive basis by almost all of the other delegations, even though we were in Paris. Whenever we were having discussions and particularly in these discussions trying to establish the new arrangement, the French were impossible. They would never agree to anything, falling back on national sovereignty, which was actually kind of amusing because when we were trying to negotiate an agreement that had some sort of teeth in it, so you could actually do something in terms of controlling these exports, the French inevitably would say, “No we can't agree to it because it will impinge upon national sovereignty to make these decisions by ourselves.” Inevitably I would say, “For forty years you have been doing this in a much more specific way with this veto, and now you say you won't do this anymore.” The French were difficult. Whenever we came up to an negotiating point that had any substance to

it, the French inevitably would say, “No, we can't agree to it,” simply because they didn't believe it was in their national interest, they wanted to make decisions on their on and didn't want anybody else looking over their shoulder, any other judgments, any other advice. They were willing to hear things like that after the sale had been made, but not before.

Q: Was there any feeling that maybe the French could be excluded?

FLACK: There were times when we could have simply said we would go ahead without the French, but you can't really. The French are one of the major exporters of high technology and dual use equipment in the world and you couldn't have an effective organization without them, basically. But, there were times when our own people were saying that maybe we should simply go ahead and do something without them. But it wasn't a very realistic approach.

Q: You mentioned that Iran and Iraq were not included in this, but when you arrived we had just finished the Gulf War against Iraq and the concern then and the concern now has been the manufacture of weapons of mass destruction. We are thinking about biological, nuclear and chemical weapons and that technology rest pretty heavily within the West. Did this come up at all?

FLACK: In an indirect way. The COCOM was specifically targeted towards the Communist Bloc and no other countries. We tried in the early 1990s to include Iran and some other countries on the proscribed list unsuccessfully basically again because the French did not agree to this. There was concern but we were not able to bring that concern into COCOM. There was an impact in COCOM as a result of the Gulf War, however, in that we learned things in the Gulf War about the importance of certain strategic items to the Iraqis, for example, but we also recognized in a general way their importance in another sense. For example, in the Gulf War you may remember how important night vision equipment was. It because extraordinarily evident that the Iraqis did not have this equipment and we did and

it was a major, major advantage. Because of that we went back to COCOM and looked at our list of equipment and realized that we had been selling night vision equipment where we probably shouldn't have been selling it in the Communist Bloc. So we tightened up a lot of night vision equipment.

When North Korea, for example, would say that they wanted to buy night vision equipment from the Dutch, who are a big producer of night vision equipment, for rescue efforts, it is hard to say no because it is very useful for rescue efforts, it is also extraordinarily useful for their military. So, COCOM usually in those cases would say no even though the stated purpose is innocuous, it was just too dangerous.

Q: Was there any re-evaluation after the unification of Germany anthe breaking up of the Soviet Union and the Communist Bloc?

FLACK: Yes. As these countries became, in some cases independent, or simply democratic, they were brought into this COCOM forum and we were starting to deal with them. Unfortunately, that has stopped. As the international political system changed and as the threat disappeared, we started getting a lot more information from these countries about how things operated in the past. As a matter of fact, the president of COCOM took a trip to Moscow and to some of the East Bloc countries. He was received there and shown around. He came back and made a report to the members which was rather extraordinary. He visited factories in East Germany that were desperately trying to get a hold of the materials that COCOM was keeping from them. In some cases he saw controlled equipment there. There was diversion. In one factory there were some machine tools made in the West just sitting there. The president asked how they had gone about getting the tools. They said, “Well, there are ways. We can go through third parties and get a hold of these things, but its almost not worth it.” The reasons were first it was very expensive costing them three or four times the normal cost of the machine tools. Secondly, there were no spare parts. Thirdly, when they received the machine, all of the serial numbers, all of the markings where it was made, were gone so they had no idea in some

cases where it was made or what number it was. Usually the machine would operate for a few months and then something would happen and they couldn't fix it and they didn't know who to call. It almost became not worth it, they said, because they could use them for a few months at very high cost and they would be useless. So, they were able to go around our rules at great expense but it was hardly worth it and the president of COCOM was told by most of these people that the system basically worked very, very effectively, even though there were these occasional diversions.

Q: When you left in 1995, it was still sort of dissolving?

FLACK: It was officially closed in April of 1994, so when I left in 1995 we were basically in the process of closing the books out. My office was on the floor above COCOM's so in the closing down process I worked very closely with them while I was closing down my own delegation. But, there were continuing kind of rump meetings to make administrative decisions on money, firings, etc.

Q: Whom did you report to back in Washington?

FLACK: It was changing all the time. A deputy assistant secretary in EB handled export controls. However, that changed at the time I was leaving and the function now is in political/military (PM). We also dealt with PM but that bureau and EB had a very bad relationship over export controls in the Department which was one of the operational difficulties we had in the field. The political/military bureau had a very condescending and unfavorable view of COCOM as a whole. They didn't really think it was worth much. To EB it was very important because they were dealing with the business community, the congress and the White House on export controls which was a very sensitive item. Eventually that changed and this function moved to PM. As a matter of fact, there were people at that point who were very concerned because they felt that the importance of export controls would be diminished because of the move to PM.

Q: 1995. Whither?

FLACK: An administrative note here. My delegation, although it was basically independent from the embassy and from the U.S. mission to OECD, for administrative purposes it was attached to the U.S. mission to OECD. So, technically, my boss was the ambassador to OECD, but in reality he had very little to do with me and I was basically on my own dealing directly with people in Washington. The only thing I had to do with OECD would be to go to occasional staff meetings there. On occasion I was charg# there when the ambassador and DCM were away.

So, when I left in 1995 I had another two years left before I knew I was going to have to retire and I was offered the diplomat-in-residence program and took an assignment at New York University for a number of reasons. I had wanted to try teaching at that point and it was a great opportunity to get an academic experience and work on personnel and recruitment issues which I find very interesting for the future of the Foreign Service. I also wanted to go to New York. Frankly, personnel welcomed my wanting to go to New York because they had a very hard time getting a diplomat-in-residence to New York.

Q: It is so expensive.

FLACK: It is expensive. A little tip here if you are looking towards retirement, however. It does have a very high locality pay which figures into your retirement. So if you spend your last few years in New York, you get a higher retirement. I was also able to work out a deal with the University where I got subsidized housing, a faculty apartment which made it easier to live there financially.

Q: I do want to ask a few questions about NYU, but first on thCOCOM thing are there any particular thorny cases that come to mind?

FLACK: There were a number of cases where very large computers were involved and the industry, itself, got involved. I would on occasion have people call me from the private

sector directly on cases and from their lobbying offices in Washington saying, “Regarding case number 4675 we are very interested in it. What is going on? What is the status? We are ready to ship and are waiting for word on this. When is it going to be decided?” And, I would have to look into these things.

The one issue that was the most important in the negotiating phase of tearing down COCOM and trying to build up this new organization, was the fiber optics and telecommunications. This was one that received the highest attention, the President was involved and the Secretary was involved. The highest level of coordination occurred with our allies and other COCOM members on how to handle this issue with regard particularly the former Soviet Union. This was a very, very sensitive issue that has not been resolved to our strategic advantage. However, it has been resolved to the advantage of U.S. industry because they can sell there now and are doing that.

Q: Okay, let's talk about NYU. You were at NYU from 1995 to 1997?

FLACK: That's right, for two academic years. I arrived in the fall of 1995. The diplomat-in-residence program is basically designed to have representation from the Department at certain major universities around the country. There are about ten of these per year where senior officers are sent out to these schools to represent the Department. I guess the most important single thing we are involved in is recruitment. We are there to be a source of information on the Foreign Service as a career and do everything we can to promote the Foreign Service career and be on the look out for interesting candidates that we can encourage. So, they give us all the recruitment information so we have it available. We do a lot of public speaking, a lot of classroom speaking.

The other side of that is a lot of academic work on foreign relations, international relations, and policy issues that we have a certain expertise on and they are interested in. Inevitably I would be asked to talk to this class or that class. As a matter of fact they asked me to develop my own course, which I did, a graduate course on diplomacy as public service

entitled “US Representatives Abroad,” which I did at the graduate level for a class of about 22 students. Here, I was not talking about policy, my course was about structure and process. More about how things are done in foreign policy and who does it. What an embassy is and how it is structured and operates. How the Department of State is structured and operates. What the inner agency process means. How does the White House and lots of other agencies get involved in international affairs on an organizational basis.

Q: Since I started this oral history program about 12 years ago, I have contact, of course, with the academic world through Internet and reading publications and there are two things that strike me. One, is how often people in the academic world of diplomatic history seem to get things wrong. They are trying to draw models when actually most of the process is much more chaotic as far as why things happen the way they do. And the other one is that the people who reach the professor rank are often products of the sixties and there is great suspicion of government and sort of anti-US type thing. Did you find that at NYU at all?

FLACK: Not necessarily in those words. I was attached to the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service and that is where I operated from, taught and had my office. My immediate experience was the faculty at Wagner which is about 30 professors. I had been looking forward to an academic experience and found it to be very different than what I was expecting. First of all I found most of the professors to be extraordinarily narrow minded, focused on their own specialties with very little interest outside their own specialties. In terms of the government I think you are right on there. They were not very well informed in terms of the government and not very well informed in terms of international affairs, even though many of them in their work were doing international programs. But, they were not very well informed and even curious in some cases of the wider aspects of international affairs. I found them to be a bit narrow minded and too focused in their specific area. I found they are being pushed into the international area and they don't like it but the students that they have now have a great interest in anything

international. These professors are finding themselves in positions where they can't handle the students interests because they don't know anything about it.

When I was asked to do my course, I was worried that I wouldn't have many students signing up for it. I said to one of the student assistants that worked with me in helping to establish the course, “This is a little outside the mainstream of Wagner students activities and I am not too sure anyone is going to sign up for this course.” This young woman said, “Don't worry about it, you are going to have a full course.” I said, “Why do you say that?” She said, “Because there are not enough course oriented towards the international area at Wagner and the students are starved for this type of thing. I can assure you that your course will be over subscribed.” And, in fact it was.

I found them to be very effective in their own way. These were people who had great specialization in things like management of health care or city management, or financial management of institutions and in one way or another they are all getting a little bit more involved in the international area. They are doing it a little reluctantly and the school, itself, was very ill prepared for it and still is because I am in touch with them on their international program. Their international program lacks focus and direction.

Q: Did you feel any residue of the sixties and the anti-Vietnam movement and sort of whatever happens in the government is an evil conspiracy?

FLACK: No, I didn't find that. Most of these professors that I dealt with have a rather close working relationship with Washington one way or another. They are involved in work in public service and have contacts in their respective departments of government down here. The other day at one of the downtown stores I ran into a professor from NYU that I knew up there and I said, “What are you doing down here?” He said, “Well I am over on the Hill working on this particular issue. You know we all come down here a lot.” I said, “Yes, that is right. I had forgotten that you people are down here a lot.” He said, “ You

know, a lot of us at NYU consider Washington to be the sixth borough of the city of New York." They come down on the shuttle all the time.

Q: You retired in 1997?

FLACK: I retired October, 1997 but still keep my office at NYU. They still have me listed as a visiting professor and I check my voice mail once in a while. I am not teaching this year.

Q: Well, I think this is a good place to stop.

FLACK: All right. Thank you very much, it has been very interesting.

Q: Thank you.

May 1999Mr. Flack is now senior managing director of a smalinvestment bank in Washington, DC.

End of interview